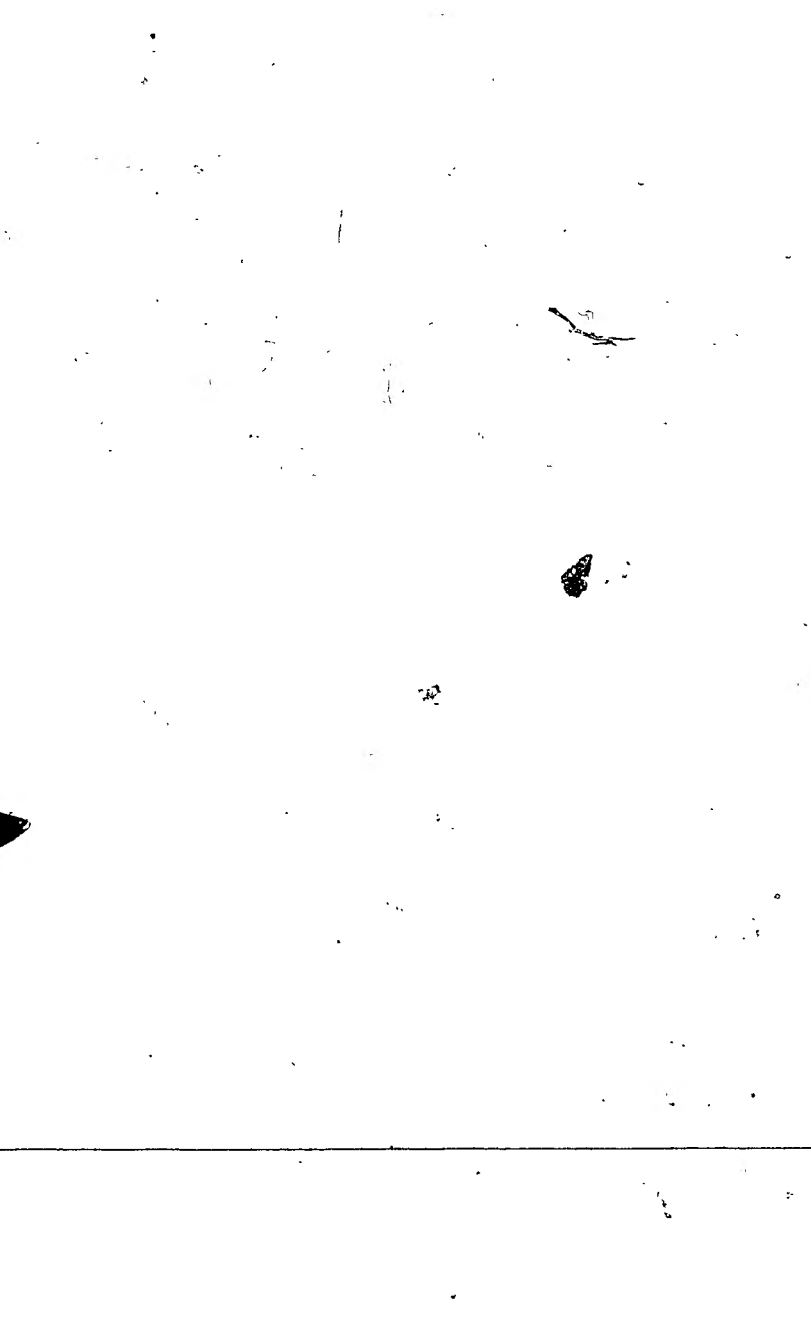


AN OUTLAW OF THE PLAINS

A story of the
Great North-West
by George Surrey





AN OUTLAW OF THE PLAINS

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Steve Hewitt is an Englishman who has gone to Canada to seek his fortune. One day, on riding into the town of Calgary, he finds a letter telling him that he has been jilted.

Then he "sees red," in the course of which he ropes a member of the N.W. Mounted Police. From that hour there were two courses open to him, to surrender to the authorities and take his punishment, or to become an outlaw.

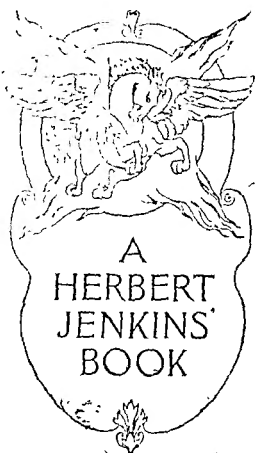
Smarting under the injury done him by the girl in England, he chooses the free life of outlawry. The story then becomes breathless in its interest. There are hold-ups, fights, narrow escapes, and the hundred and one things that happen to a man with a price upon his head.

Throughout there is the love and loyalty of Hope Marley, the girl to whose love the laws of men do not apply.

AN OUTLAW OF THE PLAINS

BY
GEORGE SURREY

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AN OUTLAW OF THE PLAINS

CHAPTER I

A WOMAN IN THE CASE

CONCLUDING that they had punched cows without a break for a spell sufficiently long, Steve Hewitt, with three other boys of the Lazy H outfit, hunted out their superior and intimidated their belief they were due for a rest.

"Meanin' to say as yer wantin' to quit?" demanded the foreman, looking up without much interest from the saddle he was engaged in repairing.

A lean, wiry Canadian, about forty years of age, but in no other outward respect differing from the men facing him, Tim Merritt was wondering how in Hades he was going to get along with but two-thirds of his proper equipment.

"Why, sure no, Tim; not for keeps," Ed McCall told him.

And "Sure not; just a quiet bit of a holiday," the others chorused.

The foreman was relieved. They were good boys; work was not immediately pressing; they'd done nothing wrong. Why not a holiday? He would have liked one himself.

"When d'you start?" he inquired.

"Rightaway," they all said promptly.

"Guess you'll be wantin' some money?"

"Now, say, Tim," they asked him plaintively.

"Did you ever go making holiday with an empty pocket?"

Merritt grinned, handed over a percentage of currency due, told them to have a good time, and continued his repairing.

Solemn faced, but with strong symptoms of hilarity within, the four retired to the bunk house, and through the open door of the kitchen, which was but a continuation of the long log-built room that served as dining and sleeping room, heaped a string of gay, insulting badinage upon the cook of the outfit, the while they shaved, brushed their clothes, routed out a clean, high-coloured neckerchief apiece, and generally made themselves fit and presentable for a trip to town.

Calgary—not quite the big city with modern improvements that it is to-day—was their object. They had been there on holiday before, coming back little the worse for it.

There was, in fact, a very quiet and simple programme ahead of them—by no means the kind of riotous dissipation fictionists and others have painted in such vivid colours as taking place in the cow towns of the western United States when an outfit of punchers makes holiday. Canada doesn't approve—never has approved—of high-spirited young men in from the ranges amusing themselves by "standing the town on its head," painting the town a gaudy vermilion, the taking of pot revolver shots at citizens inoffensive or otherwise, and the other similar delights dear to the heart of the United States cowboy.

The intended recreation of Hewitt and his pals was going to be far less elaborate. It would include the collection of mail, the meeting with a few friends,

probably a drink or two, and, certainly, a quiet game of poker. But all this very sedate. Calgary harboured no gilt and tinselled dance halls and gambling joints, where the card dealer sat with his six-shooter near to his hand, and was prompt to use it if you differed from him in your conception of fair play.

Nice looking boys, brown of skin and clear of eye, perhaps a trifle fine drawn, mounted on their best looking ponies, Steve Heweitt, Ed McCall, Jim Ferris and Dan Smith, pulled out on the trail for Calgary.

There was little to say between them while on the run, but as they approached evident signs of building enterprise said Ed:

"Say, Steve, what'll we be doing first?"

"I'm for the post office," Heweitt told him. "There may be some mail waiting to gather in. I'll bring along the letters of you fellows, if any's there."

In addition to being a good chap, Heweitt had been sufficiently long away from England and a public school to avoid that air of condescension when speaking to his companions which so many of his breed find it hard to shed when away from home. In those parts of the world where men work with their hands, the North American Continent in particular, superiority bred of the knowledge of an originally higher social status is apt to make life somewhat prickly for its owner. It is silly in addition. Ed McCall was no more than an ordinary cow puncher from Montana and in all likelihood with nothing to be proud of as to his parentage. Jim Ferris and Dan Smith were the sons of small farmers in Ontario; but there was no trace of the superior attitude in Heweitt's intercourse with them.

For the past five years, Stephen Heweitt had found life varied, but plumb full of interest. His was the real dyed-in-the-wool breed; and although he'd cut

his wisdom teeth on the rock of profitable trouble, he had suffered small pain in the process. It was only at odd moments he found himself remembering that he was a son of the minor almighty of a small English village, and his actions were those of the natural man.

McCall and the rest of the boys were acquainted with his family history—some part of it anyway, but, seeing how he behaved, they did not hold him responsible. They had proved his real worth, and, with them, he was one of themselves.

"Letters!" echoed McCall, and he laughed. "Not on your life. If you do find one, bury it. I ain't running no risks." The subject was an old one with him and the humour of it never grew stale. "Last letter I had was six years back, and I'd sure be afraid to see another."

"Right you are, my son," Heweitt returned. "I'll remember. Join you again at the Lucky Horseshoe."

They had arrived at the end of the main—and only—street, later to be known as Jasper Avenue, but at present nothing better than a wide track, with unpaved sidewalks flanked by a disconnected series of lumber built stores and dwellings, with here and there a structure in more durable material. Outside one of these wooden buildings, with a broad shingle above the entrance on which were displayed the words "V.R. Post Office," Heweitt reined in his cayuse. With a nod the other three held on their way.

Entering the post office, Heweitt pushed up to the counter and asked if any letters awaited him. He had a lively expectation. And he was not disappointed. There were two letters for him, and the clerk, when handing them across, made no effort to conceal the grin that the sight of the "Esq." after the name evoked.

"Thank you," Heweitt said politely, with an equally appreciative grin.

He glanced at the envelopes before shoving them into his pocket. Both appeared to be in the same handwriting, but it did not escape his quick eyes that the writing on one was more than a little erratic. The ink had smudged: more than one blot showed.

Heweitt bit his lip over these obvious signs of the writer's agitation; he wondered what was amiss, and his exit from the post office was hurried. He wanted to see the inside of that envelope quickly.

That was the letter he read first, although the postmark showed it to be of two days' later date than the other. But as the street is no proper place wherein to read a communication from the girl one is going to marry, and a saloon is equally unsuitable, Heweitt curbed his impatience until he had crossed the road to a livery stable and put up his cayuse. Then he hurried to a store where soft drinks and other mild refreshments were dispensed by a good-looking girl in a white shirt-waist.

"Yes?" she asked promptly as he stepped inside; and her eyes were frankly admiring.

"Cream soda," he asked for absently. The beverage was not in his line.

Sitting down at a table, he broke the envelope flap. That he was the object of some interest to the white-waisted girl, he neither knew nor cared.

"She's given him the mitten," was the girl's shrewd mental comment twenty seconds later.

Maybe Steve Heweitt wouldn't have felt flattered to know that he carried such a tell-tale face.

Heweitt had read letters, always with a European postmark and in the same handwriting, many times before in that store, and the girl knew him. She had long since made up her mind as to the nature of the contents of those pale blue envelopes. Generally,

there was an affectionate twinkle lurking in her grey eyes as she watched the reading. This morning, the twinkle was missing.

Being a woman, she jumped straight at the truth. Feminine intuition was quite enough to inform her something was amiss, and also the nature of that something. Very correctly she decided the meaning of the sudden draining of the blood from the copper-hued face of her good-looking customer, the grim and only partially successful effort to control the trembling of the lips which followed upon the conclusion of the reading of the letter, the seconds of complete immobility.

"It's a shame! The mean thing!"

So indignant was the girl that she very nearly gave her opinion of the letter-writer aloud. She might have done so: Heweitt would not have been disturbed. He would not have heard her had she shouted the words. For the moment he was stone deaf—blind, too, so far as his actual surroundings were concerned.

He was seeing something nearly six thousand miles away—a closely mown and sun-lit lawn that had the appearance of the smoothest green velvet, with beds of multi-coloured standard roses, partly shaded by a huge, spreading-limbed cedar. Beneath the branches was a hammock chair, and in this reclined a girl with very fluffy light hair, pink-and-white complexion, and large blue eyes; an open novel lay face downwards on her lap, and she was staring at the dark boughs and foliage above her head.

That girl had come before his mental vision countless times, the setting varying.

Staring at the picture, it suddenly occurred to Heweitt that it was always in an attitude of pretty indolence he had seen Amy; and now, for the first time also, there came to him the consciousness that

those large blue eyes were wanting in depth, and that they were set somewhat closely together.

The picture faded; and with a start Steve Heweitt came out of his waking dream. Settling himself stiffly in the chair, he opened and read the second letter.

This was a mere confirmation of the message the first had given him. Very politely, in stiffly constructed, formal sentences, with all the excuses and self-accusations omitted, it gave him his *congé*. It almost suggested having been written under dictation. It gave more detailed information than the second letter, but in the circumstances Heweitt was not feeling any necessity for details. The main item sufficed.

The man who loved her was away; another man had presented himself, eligible, highly commendable, more than eager. The ancient proverb concerning the bird in the hand had once more been verified. Not that Amy herself suggested this last. On the contrary—and the girl was most insistent—that Heweitt should believe this—the application of the proverb was wholly the act of her people. For her part, she would have been only too willing to wait the return of the bird then on the wing. The other man—Heweitt knew him, had thought him rather a decent fellow, but that was before leaving England—was not a millionaire, but he was well-to-do. He held property in the county. One day, barring accidents, he would be a baronet.

She hoped Steve would think leniently of her (this was part of the second, the ill-written letter). Honestly, she had fought for her absent lover. She had held out as long as she was able—to the limit of her strength; but circumstances—("That means her infernal, paltry-proud, money worshipping mother!")—circumstances had been too strong for her. She

wasn't a bit happy, and she wasn't going to be happy. That was to be her punishment—one fully deserved. It was a great deal to ask, but could Steve bring himself to forgive her? And would he try—how she hoped he might succeed!—to make himself happy with one more worthy than the miserable writer? She prayed for that consummation: for Steve was far, far too good for her.

Heweitt did not even smile as he read these last words. He had received a blow wholly unexpected, a blow below the belt, and he was too young to be promptly cynical. He sat limp and crumpled in the chair, with a half-dazed feeling that the strength had gone from his body and that the light and beauty had departed from existence.

He looked up slowly to find the eyes of the girl wearing the white shirt-waist fixed on him. There was a pitying expression in them that helped him to brace up and cease making an ugly face over the nasty, bitter taste of the dose of medicine he had just swallowed.

Upon some natures pity acts as an ice-cold douche affects the half-awake. Heweitt read the expression in the store assistant's grey eyes and mentally and physically he stiffened. He jammed the two letters into his pocket, and walked out of the store, leaving the cream soda untasted and dead flat, and the girl, whose "Good morning" he completely ignored, angry and ready to rub her eyes.

For fifty yards Heweitt travelled along the sidewalk. Then, very abruptly, he pulled up, bursting into a loud laugh. Lord! how funny it was.

Before stepping up to the post office counter to collect his mail, he had posted a long letter to that girl in England. He had had good news to give her, and had not been miserly in telling her of it, or expatiating upon the agreeable nature of the consequences.

And this had been waiting for him twelve feet away!

He had gone to Canada with one intention, a fixed idea—to make sufficient money to enable him to marry; and because he was in Calgary, looking no different from the dozen cowpunchers that could have been collected without trouble from the various saloons and hotels, it is not to be assumed that he had forgotten that intention or proved it a failure.

In Canada, the man who has made up his mind to get on, gets on, although it may well be not strictly according to a pre-arranged programme. Steve Heweitt had not loafed around, taking things easy, and waiting for opportunities to come to him. He had gone, eyes wide open, to find them, or, if they weren't to be found, to make them, both hands ready to take firm hold when they materialized. The land boom that the northern railway company had originated had caught him, and he had gone into it. And if you're cute and level headed, not inclined to be led away by someone else's specious judgment, if you're on the spot, don't listen too greedily to all the fine things that are going about at such times, know how and when to say "No" and stick to it, and, in addition, own a strong nerve, there are not many quicker ways of making money than by land speculation.

Steve Heweitt had speculated, with excellent judgment and not a little luck; and as land does not need its owner to camp on it and feed it while it grows into value, and as, moreover, the man had a natural longing for a free life and the open air, he found and held down the job of a cowpuncher.

True, his land speculations, when he let go of them, were not going to make him any millionaire. He had not aimed so high. But unless the bottom dropped out of the boom (as sometimes does happen) he reckoned that in a couple of years or less he'd be suffi-

ciently well off to be able to get back to England and marry Amy, without any grudging on the part of her people.

And now Amy had saved him the trouble. There was no need for him to get back. There was no advantage to him in being rich.

Funny! There were not words in the language equal to expressing the humour of the situation as it struck Steve Hewitt at that moment.

Again he laughed, loudly if not heartily, and spun round like a teetotum as a hand fell heavily on his shoulder. Facing him was a man he knew.

"Gotta joke, Steve?" cried his acquaintance, grinning. "Pass it along."

"Not much," replied Hewitt, promptly. "It's too damned good to share."

And he continued on his way to the saloon where he had promised to meet his three fellow holiday makers.

"Curse all women, anyway!" he ejaculated in a low, vicious tone.

And an ugly expression settled upon his face.

CHAPTER II

THE MADNESS OF STEVE HEWEITT

STEVE HEWEITT had reached a crisis in his existence, but he had no clear realization of the fact as, leaving his acquaintance staring after him, he continued on his way along the street. He was indulging in no self analysis; he was not asking himself what he now was going to do, since the purpose of his existence had been so summarily removed. He was thinking of nothing. But memory reminded him that Ed and the others were awaiting him in the Lucky Horseshoe. So there he went. But apart from his companions he had no direct purpose.

It is a point to be remembered.

A trifle less springy of step, for a mental dulness had communicated itself to his body, he stepped across the threshold into the saloon. McCall, Smith and Ferris, upright against the bar, begged him to name his pet poison, and he intimated whisky.

"Here's how," and he tipped the dram down his throat. "There was no mail for you chaps," he announced.

McCall chuckled, and he and Smith lounged to the bar as Heweitt turned to the shirt-sleeved attendant.

"Fill 'em up again, barkeep," he ordered.

It was an order to be repeated several times, but those who assert—and there were some who did—that Steve Heweitt became drunk in consequence will

not be telling the truth. He was no more intoxicated when he stepped out of the saloon than he was when he entered it. All the red eye in Alberta would have had no effect upon him that day.

His companions would have sworn to as much—were sorry later that they could have sworn nothing different. McCall, by way of being something of an expert in the matter, would have called any man a plumb liar who said Steve was drunk, even excited. His eyes were dull and remained dull; no flush came over his skin to indicate excitement, though it was the fact that he talked more than usual, and talked fast. But that started long before the spirit could have possibly commenced to take effect. The barkeep saw nothing about him inviting attention. He was loquacious and frequent in his jokes, but surely something must be allowed in that way to a man naturally feeling the relief from hard work on the ranges.

Such difference as his companions noticed in him appeared to them quite natural. His hilarity had in it nothing forced, nor could the most fastidious have taken exception to it. Possibly it occurred to Ed or Jim that good news in the mail their chum had collected was contributing to his enjoyment, but that delicacy of feeling which is one of the attributes of the cowman prevented them from making any of the would-be humorous allusions thereto most likely to be heard in similar circumstances from the average young man of the town breed.

Heweitt was elated, however, though the whisky contributed nothing to that. He might just as well have been swallowing so much water for its effect upon his temper. He knew perfectly well what he was doing; he did not forget himself for a single instant. Angry? not in the least! His grip upon himself never loosened. He was not going to degrade himself, to shame his self-respect, just because a girl

away back in England intended getting married without his assistance, although he had been calculating upon figuring prominently in the ceremony. Neither was he drinking for the reason that has driven many a man suffering from the effects of such a blow as he had just taken to seek solace in liquor. He was conscious of no feeling of sorrow or fierce regret that needed an anodyne.

He was very far from believing that life henceforth was going to be a hopeless blank, a dreary round of misery. By no means; he felt certain that he was feeling very cheerful and satisfied. Because he was a poor lover? Not at all. Steve Heweitt could not do a thing unless he did it wholeheartedly. No; he was feeling that he knew just what must be the sensations of a prisoner unexpectedly released from the prospect of a long imprisonment—of a man who has escaped irreparable disaster.

He has escaped disaster. What more natural than that he should give expression to his gratitude and enjoyment?

His escape had been a mighty narrow one. It demanded adequate celebration.

But after nearly an hour of the process, Heweitt tired of the means. For a man of his tastes whisky was wholly ineffective; he demanded some keener, some more strenuous expression of his mental and physical exhilaration.

"Boys," he suddenly announced; "I've had enough of this. See you later. So long."

"Me, too, Steve," agreed McCall. "Guess we'll all be takin' a res. Hold on, Steve; we're comin'."

"Join you later," repeated Heweitt from the doorway.

McCall elevated his eyebrows and glanced at the other two. So plain an intimation of a desire to be without their company was not to be mistaken.

"Say, boys, let's adjourn to Beckett's for a spell," he drawled. "Jim, you son-of-a-gun, I'll give you half the game an' a whippin'."

"You can try," laughed Ferris.

And they made for Beckett's pool room, to become immersed in a noisy, joyous game, which was certainly amusement, if it did not greatly resemble billiards. Thus they missed the beginning of Steve Heweitt's madness.

Without haste or excitement, with nothing about him to attract more than casual attention from the two or three acquaintances who met and exchanged greetings with him on the way, Steve Heweitt left the Lucky Horseshoe for the livery stable where he had put up his cayuse.

"Hullo, Steve; left something behind?" casually questioned the shirt-sleeved proprietor, seated on a bucket, industriously smoking.

"No; only want my pony," Heweitt answered.

"Why, you sure ain't off again?" O'Neal asked.

"Reckoned you were in town for quite a spell."

"Well, I had figured on stopping over just a while," said Heweitt, easily.

"An' now you're off again! Ain't lost all yer money already, eh? Ed McCall said you was all due at th' Horseshoe for a drink an' a poker game mebbe. You cow fellers do sure buck th' game high when you come in, but you must've had blamed bad luck if yer cleaned out already. Can I lend you a wad, Steve?" and the good-hearted proprietor, with whom Heweitt was a great favourite, got up from his bucket, ready hand in the pocket of his jeans.

Heweitt laughed. "That's all right, Mick. No, I'm not clearing off because I've been cleaned out. It isn't that I've lost any money"; and again he laughed, as though the notion tickled him. "Just thought I'd take the pony out for a spell. There's

something I want to do, and I guess I'd rather ride than walk."

O'Neal nodded understandingly and returned to his seat.

Mounting, Heweitt rode soberly into and along the main street. At Johnson's store he dismounted, went inside and spent ten minutes and a number of dollars leaning up against the counter in easy discourse with Bill Johnson and the purchase of a supply of cartridges. Outside again, he pulled up for a leisurely exchange of words with the manager of the Royal Canadian Bank who happened to be passing, then again into the saddle. Quietly he rode to the full extent of the street; and turning his pony, rode back again.

But the return was not in the manner ordinary or proper to the quiet, well-behaved young stockman Steve Heweitt was known to be.

With a yell and a whoop that would have done credit to a Red Indian brave, he drove in the spurs and sent the wonder-stricken cayuse galloping full lick. At the same instant he whipped out from under his coat the gun he carried there, a long Colt's Frontier 45, and rapidly discharged shot after shot, entirely after the manner of the cowpuncher on the spree so beloved of the magazine writer and reader, but a distinct novelty to Canada, then or at any period.

Never had Calgary been startled by so extraordinary an outbreak of the unrestrained spirit of amusement. At the rapidly reiterated explosions, the citizens in the street stopped dead in their tracks, gazing with unbelieving eyes after the horseman careering madly down the street.

"Steve Heweitt! What in thunder——?" They wanted to know.

"He's drunk!" declared some.

Drunk Steve was not; he was sober as a judge.

"The man's gone suddenly lunatic," asserted the bank manager.

Possibly he was right. It is dangerous being too emphatic in the matter of a man's sanity or otherwise.

Steve Heweitt wanted enjoyment and relaxation of the mental and physical tension to which his growing spirits had brought him. But if the bank manager were correct, his was a restrained form of madness. There were plenty of pedestrians in the street, but it was not good luck nor their agility that saved them from being ridden down by the plunging cayuse. Heweitt kept a ready and careful hand on the rein. Neither did his bullets find human billets, which also was the result of well-directed aim. He was not wanting amusement at the expense of others, so in every respect he was careful of the adjacent populace.

But he did cause a devil of a commotion.

Before he had completed his gallop and turned to repeat the amazing performance, he had the entire roadway to himself. From within doors and behind windows, hundreds of wondering eyes were concentrated on him.

From within Beckett's pool room Ed McCall and his two pals, disturbed in their game by the infernal racket, came to the doorway to learn what was the trouble. Whatever they had expected, it was not what they saw. As Heweitt flashed by, bareheaded, reins loose, waving his Stetson with one hand, a smoking six-shooter in the other, the three punchers turned upon each other, mouths agape, eyes popping with sheer amazement.

"Th'whisky was all right," said Ferris. "He must've met a skunk an' gotten hyderphobia."

"Mebbe," returned McCall shortly. "Mebbe he's plumb loco, but that don't matter; we got to help

him, an' blame quick. In this yer Canada, th'law ain't apt to sympathize none with a man's private enjoyments, whether he's in his right mind or just plain drunk. It ain't no regard for a gent's feelin's. One o' those police sharps'll wake up soon, an' make to corral him an' there's no sense payin' good money for fines. Hike out, fellers."

They went down the street full pelt, hitting the high places for the livery stable and their ponies. They were good boys, plumb loyal, and they loved Steve even more than they hated seeing good money wasted. Mad or drunk, it was up to them to save their pal from the sure consequences of his illegal form of recreation. By force of persuasion they meant herding Heweitt into safety before the law got busy. As they ran McCall explained what they would do. Each man had his rope with him.

Unfortunately, the law awoke sooner than expected and got in ahead of them. When next they saw Heweitt, they agreed sadly that their luck was dead out.

Maybe it was really the law that was responsible for the trouble that afterwards developed for Steve Heweitt. Bucking against the law when on Canadian territory is tiresome and highly unprofitable. In a western United States city, Heweitt's gaiety would have been viewed with a wide and easy tolerance. He would have amused himself until tired, gone to his hotel, taken a good sound sleep, and waked with the feeling that he had been acting very foolishly. He would probably have decided that the girl who had turned him down was not worth troubling about further, and in all likelihood have made a mental note not to overlook the chance of marrying a real girl when she came his way. At the worst he would have gone right back to the Lazy H and been a disagreeable man for a few days.

Unfortunately for Heweitt, he was not in the United States.

A constable—not one of the N.W.M.P.; they do not do street duty anywhere—had his attention attracted by the yelling and popping. He was scandalized by Heweitt's pernicious behaviour and bad example. He started right in to make himself attended to. Such behaviour certainly was not to be permitted. But the policeman did not get to work the right way.

Hurrying from the rear of a building, he came into the middle of the roadway, Heweitt twenty yards in front and reloading as he came.

"Hi, you!" bawled the policeman in angry admonition.

There followed an item or so of pointed abuse, backed by a query concerning the sanity or otherwise of the noisy rider, and followed by an assertion more creditable to the constable's conception of the mighty majesty of the law than complimentary to the delinquent's appearance, moral character, proclivities, and probable destiny.

Heweitt, still anxious not to hurt anyone, yet a trifle impatient of this interrupter of his enjoyment, reined in.

"Go to hell!" he answered tersely.

The constable lost his temper. There were excuses, he was a young man, not long appointed, and his ancestry a little mixed. Moreover, he had no experience of what an able, muscular young man in Steve Heweitt's physical and then mental condition is capable.

"What!" shouted the constable. "Be the great jumpin' horse! Git right down off'n that saddle, an' I'll arrest ye."

And he jumped in to effect his intention.

"I don't think you'll do anything of the kind," ventured Heweitt, jamming in his spurs.

The situation was appealing strongly to that par-

ticular brand of humour just then uppermost in him. The constable promised excellent diversion. Moreover, his interference dispelled the tameness that was entering into the cowpuncher's amusement. The constable's fingers hooked in the rein at the moment the cayuse jumped under the prompting of the spurs. He was switched off his balance and laid face downwards in the prevalent dust. Arrest had been evaded all right and success tempted the young man to further effort.

He ran the pony fifty yards ahead, unhooking his rope as he went. He then wheeled about and came again. The loop whirled about his head, flew through the air, and neatly settled about the shoulders of the angry officer as he rose to his feet. The trained cow pony, entering into the spirit of the joke, bounded sideways until it felt a strain on the rope, then it halted, stiff-legged. Enclosed in the tightened noose, the representative of law and order fell heavily.

"Waal, I'll be gol-durned!" exclaimed Ed McCall, five minutes after he and the two Canadians had started on their errand of mercy. "The son-of-a-gun!"

They saw an excited crowd gathering on the sidewalks watching the antics of a policeman, so neatly roped that both arms were pinioned to his sides. He was making frantic efforts to regain his feet, being frustrated as much by the watchful pony, who knew that its business was to keep the rope tightly stretched, as by its rider, who was laughing at the joke.

"What in hell's to do?" demanded Ferris helplessly.

The harm they had sought to prevent had already been done. They all fully realized there was a bad time ahead for their friend. But they might succeed in preventing bad from becoming worse, if they only knew how to do it. The offence was serious indeed,

and it was more than likely the authorities would not accept the hopeful explanation Jim Ferris had already offered, but would take a prejudiced view of the business.

"Let him go, you blame fool!" Ferris yelled suddenly.

By way of answer their pal waved his right arm gaily, lowered his gun, and sent a bullet within three feet of the unhappy policeman's ear. Then he backed his pony gently, and the officer made a wide furrow in the thick dust.

"It ought to be stopped," came in a loud, indignant voice from the sidewalk.

All that was wanted for red, raw trouble to break loose in the now crowded street was for some over-nervous man, anxious on behalf of the policeman and the good name of Calgary, to act on the assertion and attempt reprisal upon the breaker of the peace. Possibly, the sight of the revolver in Heweitt's hand contributed to the checking of such enthusiasm. Indignant as the onlookers were, none made an offensive movement. Undoubtedly there was more than one gun in the crowd, and if one excited man—and in a crowd there is usually someone prompt to lose his head—had forgotten himself so completely as to shoot, there would have followed a scene by no means unfamiliar across the border. Heweitt's exaltation had not subsided, and he would certainly have returned gun play in dead earnest; whilst McCall, and possibly the two Canadians, would have backed him up.

Fortunately such a catastrophe was averted.

"You, Jim," said McCall quietly; "you go cut that rope while I'm havin' a talk to Steve."

Before Ferris could dismount Heweitt had saved him the necessity. He had tired of the fun; it led to nothing; and his mood was for swift action. Slackening the rope, with a turn of his wrist he disengaged

it, wheeled his pony and started on the dead run down the street.

He wanted to be moving, moving fast; and he wanted to be alone. He had not overlooked McCall and the others; they were good fellows, but just then he was not hankering after their company—any company. The notion of escaping the consequences of his foolish conduct was not in his head. He simply had the desire to be by himself, to feel the hard ground slipping under his pony's hoofs and the rush of the air on his cheeks.

He wanted to get away from every damned thing.

Shouting, he jerked in his spurs, and at a thundering gallop, deaf to the shouts that followed him, he cleared the city, darted past the last settled lot, and out into the open country to where the long grassy slopes lay a shimmering golden green under the bright sun, and a faint blue haze clouded the hollows between the low hills, and a fresh sweet-scented breeze blew directly down from the unseen snow-crested peaks of the great Rockies across the foothills and amid which dwelt the peace of desolation.

Mile after mile he covered as though the devil himself were at his tail, with an empty brain and a blind, unconscious trustfulness in the hardy little animal between his knees. His eyes stared fixedly ahead, taking cognisance of nothing; until the gait of the cayuse slackened and presently the animal came to a standstill, fairly blown.

Back in Calgary, tongues were wagging over Hewitt's lunatic exploit, and McCall, Ferris and Smith found themselves centres of noisy commotion. They were invited to explain their companion's extraordinary behaviour, to put forward some hypothesis making his conduct comprehensible. But the curious gained scant satisfaction. They were as well-informed as the questionees.

"You can search me," McCall replied later, with some impatience.

Doubtless the white-waisted girl in the cream soda shop could have been more informative, but no one asked her. Neither did she volunteer any information, even to her best friend.

"It's a great big shame," she declared emphatically to the customers who dropped in and gave her an account of Steve Hewett's disgraceful doings.

But the precise meaning of her words no one troubled to inquire. They took it for granted.

CHAPTER III

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

ONE of the advantages of a refreshing sleep is that on returning to full consciousness, a man's brain is in the condition to take a calm and unprejudiced consideration of events in general.

Steve Hewett opened his eyes within a few seconds of the rays of the forenoon sun falling upon his face, stirred, rolled over upon his back, and sat up. His first thought was to wonder where the devil he was, and how he had come there. He had not the slightest recognition of his surroundings—a clump of young poplars, where it was evident he had spent the past night, if the saddle under his head and the blanket about him were true signs. But he had no recollection of making camp.

For a few seconds he lay still; then, stretching himself stiffly, he sat up. With the change to a perpendicular position, the clear vacuity of his brain vanished. In one overwhelming sweep there rushed back upon him recollection of the events of the previous day.

Also the realization that he had made a plumb fool of himself.

The discovery is never an agreeable one: Steve Hewett found it decidedly unpleasant. He had done a whole lot of things that he had no right to do, and

the remembrance brought to him no little bewilderment as well as a feeling of shame.

Drawing up his knees, he rested his chin on his crossed wrists, and proceeded to think things out.

It was his prompt conclusion that he had made a particularly condemned fool of himself. He had received a letter from a girl informing him that she could not marry him when he had made himself rich enough. Because of that, he had allowed himself to get wholly out of hand, to go on the bust, to break the law, and render himself liable to sharp punishment. Worst of all he had done that which made him appear ridiculous in his own normal, sane sight.

Steve Heweitt felt thoroughly, wholesomely ashamed of himself.

Presently he got on his legs, filled and lighted his pipe and continued his cogitations while walking to and fro. The longer he considered his recent actions, the stronger grew his dissatisfaction.

There was no blinking the facts. Not only had he made an absolute fool of himself, but he had pushed himself into a position the seriousness of which was not to be belittled, and all on account of a girl who was not "worth a five minutes' genuine heartache. There was not the faintest excuse to be offered. Nothing could mitigate the disgust he felt with himself.

The odd thing was that he was conscious of no particular bitterness or resentment against Amy. This, he explained, was because he felt too great a contempt for her to leave any room for anger. But as to himself he was both angry and contemptuous. He felt small—and painfully young.

"Now if I'd been a boy, I could understand having been so idiotically affected," he told himself aloud. "But as it is—oh! Steve Heweitt, you're the most colossal fool that ever was permitted to exist. I'm

thundering well ashamed of you. 'Whatever happens, you'll deserve it all.'

Not only his self-respect had suffered, but his self-love was wounded. This may have affected his mental attitude when he came to consider what he was to do—what should be his next move.

Common sense, in which he was not deficient normally, told him plainly enough what was the right and proper course for him to take. It was obvious that he should lose no time in getting back to Calgary, there to give himself up and take his medicine like a man, without protest or squealing. He had had his enjoyment; the payment for it should be made.

But stiff-necked pride was in the ascendant. He knew that he had been a fool to rope the policeman, but to stand up and confess as much publicly! Beyond all doubt, the magistrate's opinion of the offender would be that he was drunk, which condition would explain, though it could not excuse, the offence. It was more than likely that he would consider that a mere fine would not meet the case.

"But I wasn't drunk," Heweitt protested to himself. "All the time I knew just as well what I was doing as I do now."

Which was the fact.

But even though he made the statement, and the court consented to accept it, Heweitt could not see that his position would be improved. The reverse was far the more likely.

To admit that he had been drunk, and to be condemned for an offence he had not committed, would not content him. Drunkenness he abhorred as something inconsistent with the conduct of a gentleman.

On the other hand, it was impossible that he should stand up and inform the court that in consequence of having been jilted by a girl, he had been thrown into a condition of mind that demanded indulgence in some

fierce kind of excitement, and he had taken the readiest means of obtaining it. Anyway, it was a plea no court would admit.

Prison! Heweitt did not like the idea of that. Prison tainted and degraded a man. The bare thought of it was horrible—impossible.

Then, too, the case would surely get into the newspapers, and some "damned good natured friend"—who is to be found everywhere—might mail a copy to England. The news of his disgrace might come to the knowledge of his people. At all costs that must not be. Those in England must not suffer for his folly. It might even get to the knowledge of Amy and her parents.

Heweitt scowled viciously; he swore aloud, a full-bodied oath. Could he not hear that ferret-eyed, sanctimonious father of Amy, or her sleek, ample mother, saying to the girl:

"Have you seen this about Mr. Heweitt? A lucky escape for you, my dear. Now you can see the sort of man we have saved you from marrying. Fancy a criminal, my dear Amy! Why if you——"

The brutes! They never had liked him, and their consent to the engagement had been most grudging; and when Amy read how he had been convicted——

Heweitt thrust a hand into a pocket for his matches and it came into contact with the stiff edges of letters—her letters. The hand came out again quickly as though it had come into contact with a centipede.

"Oh, the devil!" he ejaculated irritably. "I'll—yes, damn it; I'll take a holiday."

The touch of those letters had decided him. He was not going to ride back to Calgary.

He strode from the poplar clump to hunt his hobbled horse, feeling a keen desire to locate some breakfast. He was mighty hungry. Within ten minutes he had found the cayuse and saddled it.

But before he went he struck a match and set fire to Amy's letters. Waiting until the sheets had burned away, he ground the ashes into the soil with his boot heel.

Two hours' riding with the sun as his guide, and Steve Heweitt picked up his bearings. He was somewhat surprised; and it was proof of his mental condition when making his hurried exit from Calgary that he had ridden off entirely at random, without the slightest heed to pace, distance, or landmarks. It was no wonder that the legs of the cayuse seemed stiff and its inclination towards brisk movement hard to discover.

His whereabouts learned, Heweitt's anxiety as to a meal evaporated. Breakfast was dead easy, thanks to the open door custom of provincial Canada, of which the absolute stranger is just as welcome to take advantage as the most intimate friend. Four miles from where Heweitt found himself was Joe Oliver's house by the Little Bend, and if Joe did not happen to be at home when Heweitt reached there, the grub would.

Joe was not at home, as it happened, and Heweitt, having unsaddled his pony and turned it loose to graze in the near-by corral, pushed open the unlatched door of the shack, entered, and proceeded to find and cook a meal for himself. Within twenty minutes a plentiful supply of fried bacon, warmed soda biscuits and coffee in a saucepan was on the home-made table, and Heweitt sat down to do justice to the meal.

He was half through when the owner arrived:

"Hello, Steve. How do?" Oliver greeted him. "Found a bite all right? Reckon I'll sit right down an' join you."

More bacon was sliced and fried in the pan, a fresh brew of coffee made, and Oliver joined his guest at the table.

"Well, an' how's things?" inquired Oliver when, hunger satisfied, he filled and lighted his pipe.

"Pretty fair, Joe. Might be a lot worse," Heweitt answered.

There is all the difference between a full man and a fasting; and with a good square meal under his belt, Steve Heweitt was feeling vastly more easy of mind than when striding to and fro about his last night's camp. The disagreeableness of his position had retreated considerably into the background.

"We'd pretty good results at the last Lazy H round up in April," he went on. "Better lot of calves than we saw last spring. More of 'em too."

"You're lucky," returned Oliver. "More'n I can say, thanks to the cussed screw worm. It's played the devil with my lot. Now you're for Calgary, I reckon, and a bit of a spree."

"No," answered Heweitt with perfect ease, "As a matter of fact I'm just from there."

"Good time?" And Oliver grinned.

"Less than a day."

Oliver's grin developed into a full-mouthed laugh of understanding.

"Dollars run short, eh? You must've had a gay time."

"Not so gay as you think," Heweitt answered.

"No, that's not the reason why I came away," and he, too, laughed.

But Joe Oliver was not feeling curious. He made no comments.

"In a hurry about gettin' back, old man?" he queried.

"No, not particular," was the truthful reply. "Why?"

"Well, I was goin' to say, if you ain't, maybe you'll stay over with me a while. There's some stock needs a bit of doctoring—too much of it to suit me;

and it's a hades of a job doing it single-handed. Are you on?"

Heweitt was on; the suggestion was one falling in very comfortably with his notion of taking a holiday.

"That's all right," he said.

The table cleared and the plates washed, he and Joe, who lent him a fresh pony, mounted and went out over the range to hunt up the afflicted beasts. Four hours were pleasantly passed searching the draws and coulees, Heweitt roping and tying the animals, while their profanely talkative owner did what was necessary to them with carbolic and chloroform. They rode back to the shack during the early evening in the best of spirits. After supper came pipes and a yarn, Oliver retired to his bunk, and Heweitt, wrapped in a blanket, sought his rest on the floor.

That night Heweitt slept like a top, lost in a healthy, childlike slumber into which entered no disturbing dreams of blue-eyed jilts or angry-faced policemen.

For two days Heweitt remained with his friend. Joe lent him a rifle, and he put in two half days' shooting. The sport was good. Sleeping or waking, the thought of Amy did not worry him a little bit.

On the third morning he said good-bye to Oliver, and loafed across to Sheep Creek, called at a ranch kept by two brothers named Donovan, stayed the night, lost ten dollars at a game of draw poker, and enjoyed himself immensely.

Having no occupation he found mighty pleasant. He had not experienced a genuine holiday from work for quite a long while. There was a novelty in being his own master that he found very soothing. He concluded that he must have needed a holiday badly. He was free from care. Of Amy he thought only at odd moments, and lazily, without anger or reproach. He was going the way to forget her entirely. The Calgary incidents were entirely off his mind. When he

had none but himself for company, he was conscious of no dissatisfaction.

He spent over a week loafing thus, making no serious effort to withdraw himself far from the Calgary neighbourhood. But he did avoid main trails. The country was but sparsely settled, yet that made no hindrance to regular eating. He knew the country and he knew himself welcome, and he had no scruples against taking advantage of the ready hospitality. But he did not always sleep indoors. He preferred to make his own night camp in some coulee, or by a tamárac clump, where he could sit by the fire as long as he pleased, and turn in under the stars when the final pipe was smoked. Such nights were perfect. He gladly missed the clanging bell that had brought him from his bunk at Curtis's ranch when his world was waiting, silent and expectant, between the passing of night and the coming of a new day.

It was an idle, a persuasive life, with the warm dry chinook upon one's cheek, the rich colourings of the flowering earth and the delicate tints of the woodlands delighting the eye and alluring the senses. Everything combined to emphasize the wisdom of the man who had chosen between the glorious delights of such freedom and the gaol.

Heweitt had not as yet realized everything that the choice he had made included. He had not made the attempt; he had kept his mind from analysis of the consequences. He would not admit the fact to himself, but that ill-scrawled and tear-blotted letter he had converted into a black dust that destroyed within him the spirit of inspiration. Unconsciously he was admitting that there was nothing in existence for which to continue to strive. The finger of hope no longer beckoned him; ambition was dead. The hope of possessing Amy had been the motive power behind the strenuous exertion of his faculties; now that their

driving force was withdrawn, their exercise towards material development had ceased also. The hundred and one things that had mattered so greatly a month ago now had no value. Steve Heweitt no longer cared.

But he would have scornfully denied that any radical change had taken place within himself. Challenged, he would have argued himself nowise different from what he had been. This was not the truth. The care-free enjoyment of his holiday, his purposelessness, the complete satisfaction with his decision to disregard the consequences of his unloosing in Calgary, were evidence not to be controverted of an alteration in him—one not for the better.

He would have said that his release from Amy was a great and blessed benefit, for which he could never be too thankful. But, then, he had withheld from himself consideration of whither this freedom was leading him.

Heweitt had completely forgotten his handling of the Calgary policeman, but the authorities had not. The good name of the city precluded any such forgetfulness. If they had made no great noise, they had not been asleep. Heweitt happened upon a reminder.

He had wandered rather nearer to Jumping Round Creek than was safe, and there he met with a man driving a waggon and team. He was a freighter who had left Calgary that morning. His horses were fresh, the trail good and dry, and in consequence, the freighter himself was in a good temper and bent on conversation.

"Blame fool who got drunk and roped a policeman, an' lugged him along the street, ain't in gaol yet," he cheerfully remarked, the customary greeting exchanged.

"Oh, how's that?" Heweitt inquired.

"You can search *me*. Reckon it's because there's

no git-up-'n'-git in them city folks," the freighter returned scornfully.

Heweitt laughed. "They do seem slow," he admitted. "When did this happen?"

"More'n a week ago," the man said. "Ain't you heard of it?"

"Well, no one has told me."

"Had a hell of a time that feller,"—with a chuckle.

And then the man went on to give an account of his listener's own escapade that lost nothing in the retailing.

"The hull city's gettin' most rombusious about it, an' nothin' bein' done t' bring th' feller in," he concluded.

"Drunk, was he?" inquired Heweitt, highly edified.

"Why, sure. Drunk as David's sow. What else?" returned the man. "If three fellers who was along with him—punchers, same as him—hadn't pulled their guns an' kept th' crowd back while he hit th' breeze for th' outside, there'd 've been a blame fine lynchin' right there in the main street."

"So he got off then?"

"Sure thing. Them city folks just naturally ain't gotten no sand, I reckon," the freighter snorted, with all the plainsman's fine contempt for the town dweller.

"One feller holdin' up a whole street full! Plumb disgustin', I call it."

"Maybe he's a desperate character," Heweitt suggested.

"Character as I ain't wantin' to meet," admitted the man. "I met up with th' breed before. It's dangerous, plug you from behind before you know where you are. He's still loose—snoopin' around somewhere close at hand, I shouldn't wonder. Sorter feller, I reckon, to go scarin' the eyes outer the women left by themselves on lone ranches. Blame glad my

woman ain't afraid of a gun or an ugly-face. She'll know how to use it all right if he comes foolin' around where she's about. What I want to know is what in hell's the good o' them mounted police."

"But how do you know he'd molest a woman?" Heweitt asked curiously.

"His sort ain't particular, you can bet yer sweet life," the man replied with decision.

"And haven't the mounted police taken the matter up yet? They're not very far behind as a rule," said Heweitt.

This was a matter that did interest him.

"Yes—but a week late," said the freighter grudgingly. "Mebbe them city fools allowed the feller was comin' in on his own, sayin' as he felt plumb sorry an' would never do it no more. Sure likely, ain't it?"

"Well, I reckon the mounted police won't get him," observed Heweitt lightly.

"Waal, I reckon ye've no call, stranger, to be so certain as all that," the man took him up quickly, unwilling that any beside himself should do the criticizing. "Them police is powerful smart fellers, an' now they're on the war path, I reckon that feller's good as gaoled."

Heweitt did not continue the argument: he had heard enough to set him thinking. A mile beyond, where a side trail broke into the one he was travelling, he parted company with the freighter, riding north.

That evening, Heweitt did not eat before making camp for the night, and he was extra careful in selecting an inconspicuous location. Neither did he light a fire. He missed the company and the cheerfulness of the blaze before rolling himself in his blankets.

But before that happened he had smoked many thoughtful pipes.

The freighter's remarks concerning his own char-

acter had not worried him; what the man had said about the mounted police did. It made clear to him that his lazy, care-free life of the past few days had reached its end. If he were still determined to keep clear of gaol, it was necessary that he take serious precautions to secure his safety. The N.W.M.P. were a proposition not to be tackled lightly. They had practically unlimited powers. Their zeal and courage were a byword. For their shrewdness and pertinacity, Steve Heweitt had every respect. He needed no telling that the man who matches himself against them has no end of a hard time to keep his end up. And the end is generally an unqualified triumph for the police.

But knowing this as he did, Steve Heweitt did not weaken in his resolve. Common sense reproached him for his folly in not taking advantage of the opportunity to come in and surrender himself that the authorities had offered; but common sense found itself up against his stiff-necked pride and retired defeated.

When he awakened in the morning, Heweitt turned the head of the cayuse southward. He had made up his mind. He would make tracks for British Columbia, which was big enough and wild enough for Steve Heweitt to become successfully lost. There and under another name (that was disagreeable, but could not be helped) he would make a fresh start.

For the moment, however, he was hungry, and it was this fact that made it disagreeably manifest to him that he was but ill-equipped to carry on defensive war against the police, assuming that he found it impossible to carry his project into effect. Proclaimed by the police; it would be impossible for him to rely upon the hospitality of settlers and others for sustenance. To enter one of the roadside hotels would be dangerous; and though the country through which

he would pass held an abundance of winged game, duck, prairie chicken, and blue grouse, the same was of but little use to a man whose only weapon was a six-shooter. A man cannot live without food, and without the wherewithal to obtain it, he must soon be forced into giving himself up.

Three hours after sun-up, he reached the Elbow river, but it was too full to cross, and he turned to ride along its bank with the hope of coming upon a ford. He located it, a little above where the river enters the Sarcee Indians' reservation, and was actually in the water when something happened that brought him to a dead standstill.

The bank was clean, without timber or brush, and upon the face of the golden prairie beyond he caught sight of a couple of moving dots, easily visible in the clear light of the sun.

For a quarter of a minute Heweitt remained quite still, the water flowing about his pony's knees, his eyes glued to those tiny moving patches of vivid colour. There was no need for him to ask himself twice what they meant. They were the uniforms of two men of the mounted police. After what he had heard from the talkative freighter, it was no unnatural conclusion that the wearers were interested in himself.

The moment was one of importance to Steve Heweitt's future life.

Crystal clear there came to him the realization that he was standing at the parting of the ways. His feet were at the junction where the trail of the outlaw and the bad man diverges from the road followed by the law-respecting and law-abiding citizen. Now, and without hesitation, it was for him to decide which path he should turn into. And the decision would be irrevocable.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRAVE DECISION

BEFORE Heweitt were two courses, involving a certainty and a doubt—gaol, or the open plain and the lonely hills, with every man's hand against him, and freedom for so long as his nerve and grit, his luck and frontiersman's cunning, served him to the outwitting of his enemies; freedom which at any hour might be ended by a bullet.

Here was his opportunity to make his choice, and it would never again be offered him.

Unconsciously his eyes roved about him, almost wonderingly, at the golden shimmer of the grass, at the greenish grey of a poplar clump, dim against the dull purple of a distant bluff, up to the soft blueness of the summer sky. Once he looked over his right shoulder to where, behind a pearly haze, rose the giant flanks of the mighty Rockies, titanic barriers that carried the horizon high into the western sky.

And then he thought of the gaol.

The last few days had been very pleasant. He was asking himself whether he should exchange their liberty and joyousness for the confinement, the misery and the disgrace of prison.

The free life was calling him. He heard its voice in the faint humming of the breeze, the murmuring of the river as its waters swished about the legs of his cayuse. Was the temptation nothing more than a delusion, a snare set for the capture of his soul?

Which was it to be? Should he hearken to the many

so insistent voices about him, or should he humble himself? Should he go back and take his whipping like a repentant erring schoolboy, or play a lone hand against Fate?

Even as he pondered—a mere matter of seconds—the dots grew larger as they drew nearer to the river. Suddenly Heweitt saw himself back in the refreshment store in Calgary, where he had read Amy's letter; saw the face of the girl in the white shirt-waist who had watched him while he read. He could read the expression in those grey eyes. The girl was pitying him. Perhaps she had guessed what had befallen him and was sorry. Others, too, might pity him. To be pitied because a girl had refused to marry him! Stiff-necked pride revolted at the thought. His lean, bronzed face hardened; a stubborn bleak expression leaped into his eyes.

"By God! I'll show them," he cried recklessly. Steve Heweitt had made his choice.

Turning his pony, he regained the bank he had just quitted and headed for a trail leading back into the hills. He felt confident that he had not been seen.

That day he rode fast and late, and both he and his horse were feeling used up, when, close upon sundown, they came in sight of a small, roughly-built shack. A man was leading a horse to drink at a creek close by, and Heweitt shouted to him.

The man glanced at him keenly, but made no answer.

Heweitt was feeling the want of food, and if a meal were to be obtained, he meant to have it. He reined up, waiting until the horse was watered. Then he rode alongside the man towards the shack. He was a surly-looking fellow; his answers were in monosyllables; and he omitted the customary hospitable inquiry whether the stranger would join him at supper. Finally, Heweitt asked him if he could be spared a meal.

The man, who appeared to be a settler from across the American border, glanced at his questioner with a half-surly, half-apprehensive expression.

"Waal, I guess yew might," he drawled at length. But it was a grudging affirmative.

Having hobbled the pony and turned him loose, Heweitt followed his unwilling host inside the untidy shack. While the man busied himself with the frying pan, Heweitt chopped wood for the fire. The inevitable bacon and coffee, with soggy, half-raw, half-burnt dough-cakes formed the meal. The American made a sort of apologetic explanation of the meagreness of the entertainment by the statement that his stores were running short.

"An' this is a far-away, God-forgotten location," he added. "Ain't many as comes this way, an' them as does ain't that all-fired struck with it they wants t' stay longer than they can help."

Heweitt agreed, with the mental reservation that the locality had its good points because of its isolation and poverty.

"What brought you here?" Heweitt asked conversationally.

He was not impressed by his grumpy, morose host; but the man had satisfied his hunger to the extent of his ability, and the least he could do was to make himself agreeable. For all that, he was keeping a wary eye on the man, who, when he supposed himself unobserved, had shot more than one stealthy glance at his guest suggestive of anything but friendliness.

Before replying, and for some time, the American gazed at him from under bushy red eyebrows.

"Guess it was jest plain cussedness," he answered.

"Not much of a living to be made hereabouts seemingly," went on Heweitt.

The man lifted a wary eye from the plug he was cutting upon the palm of his dirty hand

"No," he said curtly, with a suggestion of resentment of his companion's inquisitiveness. "Depends upon the kinder livin'," he added, having lighted the evil-smelling tobacco.

"Sure," agreed Heweitt. "But the land may prove valuable should the railroad people take it into their heads to extend out in this direction. They may some day."

The pair sat smoking in silence for some minutes, then the American said abruptly:

"Hev a taste o' whisky, stranger? Reckon I can find some."

"Thank you, no," Heweitt answered, rousing himself from the somnolent reverie into which he was falling.

The offer struck him as being more interested than hospitable.

But the American, putting down his pipe, slowly rose from his packing-case seat, and, moving backwards, his eyes on Heweitt all the time, walked to one of the rubbish-filled corners of the room. He returned to his seat with a more active step, but instead of the expected whisky bottle, it was a double-barrelled gun with sawn-off barrels he brought along with him. With a rag he proceeded to go over the mechanism with care, and made what seemed an ostentatious display of the fact that the weapon already had cartridges in the breech. Heweitt watched the performance with some interest.

"Shooting to-morrow?" he asked pleasantly, as though determined to read no unpleasant meaning into the other's action, or take notice of his surly humour.

And for the first time he received a square look into his eyes. It was but a brief glance, but it told of suspicion and hostility.

"Dunno 'bout ter-morrer," the American growled,

speaking very carefully. "Guess I might wanter use it any ol' time. Yew never knows"; and, satisfied with the condition of the gun, he shoved back his seat until his back was close against the unchinked rough slabs of the wall, the gun between his ragged knees.

"What the devil do you mean?" Heweitt suddenly burst forth, irritated as much by the man's manner as his ambiguous words. "Do you mean you're nervous that I shall do you any harm?"

For some seconds the settler waited before making reply to this direct question. Then, for the second time, his eyes met Heweitt's angry gaze. He seemed to have acquired a greater confidence and decision.

"Waal, stranger," he drawled, at the same time bringing the gun across his knees; "guess I ain't takin' no chances when I meet up with th' feller who dragged a p'liceman long the street down in Calg'ry mebbe a week or so back."

For the moment Heweitt was thoroughly taken aback. It had certainly not occurred to him that this man had discovered his identity, and the realization found him at a loss. He was left without an immediate rejoinder, staring into the man's red-rimmed eyes.

"Talking out of the back of your neck, aren't you?" he at last jerked out.

The man grinned craftily, his eyes vigilant.

"Mebbe; stranger, but I ain't chancin' things anyway," he said.

He was ready on his weapon, and had it prompt for action as Heweitt rose abruptly from his seat.

"Take care," he warned, but his voice lacked steadiness.

Annoyed though Heweitt was, he had not thought of violence. He was staying no longer, however. It was not so much the recognition that alarmed him, as

the suggestion of what might be expected in future from him. He was an outlaw!

"Don't be a damn fool," he cried angrily. "Asses such as you oughtn't to be trusted with fire-arms. You're dangerous. Here, take the worth of my supper out of that."

He flung a dollar down on the table amongst the dirty plates and mugs and made for the door. The settler made no move, but shouted a warning as the door was flung open.

"I'll be sittin' up th' night."

"You can sit there until the crack of doom," retorted Heweitt with violence. "And be damned," he added.

Catching the cayuse, he flung the saddle on its unwilling back, mounted and rode off, to make camp more than a mile distant amongst the cottonwoods fringing the creek. For the first time since going on the scout he slept badly.

He was awake and about before the sun was up next morning, having a long day ahead of him. Before falling asleep, he had considered what to do and had come to the determination to make immediate tracks for the Lazy H ranch house. Here he would wait around in hiding until all the riders would be out on the range. There would then be only the Chinaman cook about, Curtis's being a "stag" ranch. He would go up boldly and collect such of his belongings as might be of use. He wanted his rifle, further cartridges, an extra blanket, a few odds and ends. Lo Sin would be far too prudent to attempt any hindrance, and Heweitt felt there would be no very great risk in turning up at the ranch. No doubt the boys knew well enough what had happened. They would have learned that he had not gone back to Calgary, and would draw their own conclusions. That they would not give him away, even though the police

came to the ranch making inquiries, he was confident. Cowpunchers' loyalty to each other would not allow of that, even though the missing one were known to be on the wrong side of the law. He felt, however, that, under the circumstances, he would prefer not to come face to face with his old comrades. The situation would be too disagreeable.

After leaving the ranch, he would trail out for the north, where there was better chance of avoiding acquaintance with the inside of a gaol. The British Columbia notion he had given up, at least, the leaving of the Dominion by a southern route. With the police, who had the telegraph at their disposal, definitely out after him, that scheme had become too dangerous. But in the unsettled country, the wide stretching forest area north of Edmonton, he would stand a fair chance of retaining his freedom, a better than if he remained in the lands traversed by railroads.

Thence, too, might come the opportunity of carrying out his original plan. The untravelled, almost unexplored region of the more northerly part of the boundary line would hold but a minimum of danger. The trails were but few; the inhabitants were limited to the occupants of the Hudson Bay trading posts, roving bands of Cree and Beaver Indians engaged in hunting and trapping, with a spattering of white men—wandering prospectors and miners.

There were a thousand hiding places to be chosen. Game was plentiful; the posts of the North West Mounted Police were very few and scattered hundreds of miles apart; news travelled slowly. During the summer and autumn months life could be made very pleasant. When the winter came—well, other white men had wintered up there; he could do the same. Anyway, it was now early summer, and a man is a fool who begins to worry himself as to what is likely to happen several months ahead.

Heweitt's scheme had in it most of the elements of success; but it miscarried from the outset, and hardly through any fault of his own.

Ten miles from Bearspaw Creek, his horse put a hoof in a rabbit hole, and when Heweitt picked himself up from where he had been slung, it was to find the animal helpless with a snapped fetlock.

Heweitt cursed his luck—the rest of his journey to the ranch would have to be on foot, a twenty-mile tramp. There was no help for it. A rifle he must have, and now a new pony in addition; if it were to be had some money would not be amiss.

He first put a merciful bullet through the brain of the sorrel cayuse, smiling grimly that his last cartridge would have to be used for the deed of mercy. Yet the poor brute could not be left to die a lingering death.

Many times during that day did Heweitt anathematize his ill luck. His boots were not built for walking, nor were his legs accustomed to the effort. Making all the haste he could, progress was painfully slow. His toes blistered and he had an empty stomach. He was still struggling wearily along when darkness overtook him. But he knew where he was. He had ridden those hills and draws too many hundreds of times to be at fault. He drew a long breath of relief when he crawled up a well-known coulee—a breath of pleasure also, for to his nostrils was borne warmly and strongly the smell of cows.

He was within easy distance of a bunch of cattle though the darkness hid them from view. But in a further minute he pulled up short. His ears had caught the sound of a pony's hoofs, and the pony was mounted. This was not the time of the year for cattle to be rounded up and held on their sleeping ground,

Presently he heard the thin, distant sound of a man

singing—one of those dim, monotonous chants with which cattle rounded up on the plains at night are soothed to quietude, so that they will doze where they lie, and not provide the night herd with unwanted exercise.

Crouched on the ground, listening to the weird sounds, Heweitt forgot for the moment the circumstances that brought him to where he was. Many a time he had ridden night herd himself, and his mind went out to the man on the pony, whoever he might be, who was slowly drawing nearer. Droning away with mechanical monotony, he would be wondering how far off was the moment when his relief would come along. Heweitt knew the pleasure with which that appearance would be welcomed; the prompt return to the camp with its diminishing fire, the quick dive into the blankets, the brain-absorbing sleep until the long call of the cook aroused the camp to breakfast and the beginning of another day of work. If he—

Quick and sharp came the stab of recollection. He had done with all that. He was a night skulker, an outlaw, an Ishmael with the hand of every honest man against him. And he was an Ishmael in a bad fix, which soon would be a worse one if he could not get what he wanted.

And why not get what he wanted here and now, taking advantage of the chance that Fate had sent him? Why run the risk of going to the ranch? The police might be there already, perhaps in hiding round about, having anticipated his intention, and expecting easy capture.

The idea was workable, although it would be rough upon the unsuspecting victim, but a man had the right to think first of all of himself. It was not for him to worry about the troubles of other people.

Yes, he would do it.

Slowly the night herder drifted towards the outlaw,

the words of the doleful dirge he was crooning becoming distinct. It was a song that Heweitt knew well:

"He was only a cowboy gone on before,
He was only a cowboy we'll never see more;
He was doing his duty on the old N A range
But now he is sleeping on the old staked plains."

"He leaves a dear wife——"

"Hell! What in——"

The song ended abruptly as the pony, suddenly scenting the hidden man not six feet away, pitched violently. Before the surprised rider had more than begun his angry query, there was a rustling, and then fingers clamped on his left arm with the strength of a vice. He did not call out—there was no time. The puncher was lugged from the saddle and brought heavily upon the thick grass.

Dropping his knee from the pony's ribs, with one movement Heweitt whirled the reins over its head to hang loose in front, thus guarding against its bolting; turning, he pounced upon the fallen man. Both hands sought for and gripped fiercely upon his throat, and, with knee driving firmly under the breast-bone, he had the night herd speechless and helpless before there was time to attempt effective opposition.

"Keep quiet or I'll throttle you," he viciously enjoined his victim. "Raise a shout, and you'll finish in hell. I'm——"

"What in——" gasped the man underneath, finding an instant's breath under the slightly slackened grip.

There was amazement rather than anger in the tone of the strangled exclamation. And then the hard pressure of knee and fingers sensibly lessened.

"McCall!" panted Heweitt, no less flabbergasted than the sufferer.

His hands shifted to the other's shoulders, and he stooped to peer closely into the face of his former chum.

With a long breath the outlaw drew clear, his knees in the grass, his brain in a whirl.

"An' that's Steve Hewett. Why, what you doin', partner?"

"Ed, I swear I never dreamed it was you."

"But—but what's it all about, Stevie?" asked the Montana cowpuncher, but making no effort to get up.

"Heard you coming; and I reckoned it was an easier way of getting hold of what I wanted than the one I'd planned," explained Hewett.

McCall seemed to find the explanation somewhat wanting.

"But what d'you want?" he questioned, bewildered. "What you doin' here, like this? An' why'd you manhandle me this way?"

He made a move towards sitting up, and in an instant the outlaw's hands seized him again, forcing him back.

"I'm wanting a horse, money, a rifle, and some other things," returned Hewett, his voice firm. "And I mean to get them. Understand? If I let you up, Ed, will you promise me not to make a noise? I'm taking no chances this trip, and if you were my own brother it'd be the same."

"Why, sure, Stevie; I'm making no racket," answered McCall mildly. "Lemme up. But what the sufferin' snakes it all means——" He stopped short, imagination baffled.

"You may well be surprised, Ed," said Hewett grimly. "There are times when I can hardly believe it myself. But I'm in earnest all the same. Sit up; you've given your word, and that's good enough for me, whatever I may be."

When in a more comfortable position, McCall provided relief for his overcharged feelings in orthodox cow-puncher fashion, then broke into a chuckle.

"Yer goin' some, Stevie boy. You sure have got a gall to come here an' hold me up this way," he declared. The notion seemed to amuse him and he found relief in a fresh series of quiet chuckles. "Why, Steve, when it comes to bein' a real bad man, all wool an' a yard wide, you sure've gotten the hang of it mighty quick."

"One learns fast enough when it's necessary," rejoined Heweitt grimly.

"But what I ain't on to yet——" began McCall, then he broke off abruptly. "Well, Steve, and what's the news?" he asked pleasantly.

"The news, Ed, is that I'm entered and already blooded for being what you called me just now. I reckoned I was not coming back for that affair in Calgary. I mean something better than that. I'm an outlaw all right now. But my pony's gone under—poor brute broke its leg ten hours ago, and I've got to get another. As it's you I've happened upon, Ed, that new pony I mean having has got to be this of yours."

Heweitt spoke in a low, steady voice, the quiet, matter-of-fact tone of one giving the most innocent piece of news. McCall listened to him with attention.

"Geewhiz!" he ejaculated; but he did not sound as one really convinced.

"Say, Steve," he said earnestly, after a brief silence. "Ain't yer stringin' me now? Ain't all this yer no more'n a joke? Ain't you comin' back again here same as before along with me an' the rest of the boys?" His voice was persuasive.

"With the police ready to rope me in first chance, which they'll take care is an early one?" said Heweitt. "No, Ed, not much. I'm for the hills for good. There's no place for me now along with you and the other boys."

"Well, if a man's born for a rope necktie, he'll

sure find it easy to fix it all right," the cowpuncher said philosophically.

"But he'll put off the fixing just so long as he can," returned Heweitt. "That's what I mean to do."

McCall emitted a long sigh, perhaps of resignation. He did not understand, but fully recognized there are forces against which it is impossible to fight successfully—a man's intention to go to the devil being one of them!

"What is it that you want me to do, partner?" he asked.

"Hand over all you've got on you I'm likely to find useful," replied Heweitt, succinctly. "The pony's here; I'll take him just as he stands. I want your gun and cartridges, Ed; your rifle——"

"Hold on. I pass," McCall interrupted. "Left th' rifle at th' ranch, allowing there'd be no use for it this trip." In the darkness he smiled faintly. "As for th' rest, Steve, I reckon yer plumb welcome to it all. As for money—well, I didn't prognosticate this was goin' to be any spendin' excursion, so I brought none. You can search me."

"No need for that, Ed. As I said before, although I am an outlaw, I can still take your word. I'm sorry that it's happened to you to drop in for this, but it can't be helped, though I'd rather it was someone else."

"Don't say that, partner," Ed said quickly. "I ain't. You'n me was sure pals ever, so it's only right I should be the one to help yer if I can. Though how I'm goin' t' explain to th' others the muss yer meanin' to leave me in—well, chase me. One pony short, an' there's Logan lyin' in a blanket 'long side th' fire yonder with a couple of ribs busted. Gee, but I can see me an' old Tim Merritt's got a tough hand to play this time."

"How do you come to be here at all, Ed?" asked

Heweitt curiously, the phenomenon interesting him in spite of more personal interests.

"Gettin' in a bunch to take along, partner. Yer see, the boss've done a good deal. He's sold a right smart lot o' stock to a young Britisher who's so rich that he eats money four times a day. Bought a ranch he has over by the Little Red Deer. Reckons as he's goin' to learn cattle raisin'. We'll be drivin' our cuts over to him; and say, Stevie, if you ain't wantin' to see the inside o' the calaboose mighty quick, for the love of Mike don't go north."

"Don't go north! Why not?" demanded Heweitt sharply.

"Because the Mounters have calculated on that and are aiming to pick you up quick. They got a patrol out along the railroad in case yer aimin' to get across, an' they're stringing out along both sides, a hell of a lot of 'em. Lively as skeeters they are on the hunt for you."

The information was valuable, and Heweitt thanked McCall warmly. He said he'd think over what was best to be done. But he was anxious to get away as soon as possible. It was nearing the hour for the relieving night herd to show up, and, although he did not mind McCall, he felt he would rather not renew acquaintance just then with any of the other boys, though feeling no doubt about them. Moreover, he had not failed to detect signs and sounds indicating that the cattle near by were growing restless, as they always will as soon as they begin to smell the approaching dawn. Considering all that McCall had done for him—and what he had done to McCall—he was not willing to give that unfortunate puncher the additional misery of a night stampede.

"Well, so long, Ed," he said.

Involuntarily he held out his hand. He remembered instantly, a wave of hot blood flooding his face in the

darkness, and he withdrew the hand, laughing harshly.

"Sorry," he said. "I was forgetting that I'm an outlaw now. I did not mean to insult you."

"Sorry!—Insult be damned!" ejaculated McCall, exploding into sudden violence. "What in hell's it matter what yer are? Ain't you Steve Hewitt still? An' ain't that good enough for me? I guess I ain't become no one else sudden. Here, 'shake!" And he gripped Hewitt's hand in a mighty, crushing clasp.

With all his stolen gear Hewitt trailed off silently into the darkness, the last word he heard being :

"Best o' luck t' ye, partner."

For a while the cowpuncher stood looking into the dark void into which his friend had vanished. He was feeling as he had never felt before. Without realizing it he was swearing to himself with extreme intensity.

A prolonged note from a restless steer aroused him to a recollection of his duty. Backing well away from the area where the beasts were gathered—cattle are scared of a dismounted man—he went quickly back to the camp.

"Now ain't it just hell!" he kept repeating to himself at intervals as he went along.

The account he gave later of what had befallen him during his vigil was received with cold incredulity or amazed admiration according to the disposition and state of temper of his several hearers. But the name of Hewitt did not enter into his elaborately decorated story.

CHAPTER V

THE FRIEND IN NEED

FIVE days after his meeting with McCall, Heweitt reached the south fork of the Sheep River. Twice during that period had he ridden up to ranch or shack for a meal. But he had gone warily, watchful and suspicious, not knowing whether the mounted police had got into the district ahead of him, and notified householders that one, Steve Heweitt, was "wanted"; in which case an invitation to enter and share a meal might be a cunning feint concealing intent to capture.

The ostentatious display of arms not being prevalent in Canada, Heweitt, while not allowing the revolver annexed from McCall to become obtrusive, was careful to have it handy in the event of an accident arising.

He was travelling south in deference to the information given him by McCall, having abandoned the intention to make for the wooded region north of Edmonton. He was fully aware that any secure hiding place in the neighbourhood was beyond all hope, thanks to the thoroughness with which the men of the mounted police comb a country and the infernal pertinacity with which they follow up the most threadbare trails. He was hopeful that by keeping to the hills, and given a fair share of luck, he would get down to and cross the forty-ninth parallel. Once in

Montana, a country not yet tamed, where gun-plays still flourished, and the law was none too exigent in respect of bad men who refrained from making themselves a positive nuisance, he would reckon himself comparatively safe.

He no longer rode with the careless ease of a man making holiday, but after the manner of a scout operating in an enemy country, there being no telling when the disturbing sight of a police uniform might meet his eye.

It was growing dark as he rode up the South Fork Valley, yet his caution was undiminished. He located a house, one of some size and with extensive buildings. Deciding that a daylight call would be more prudent, he camped, supperless, in a tamarac clump. He had some acquaintance with the man of the house, but being acquainted with a man is no guarantee of his goodwill when you happen to be an outlaw. The offence of "harbouring" is regarded seriously, and the pains and penalties attached thereto are proportionate.

In the morning, hungry as a timber wolf in February, Heweitt made his way towards the house, hoping that there would be no one about. But his hope was short lived, a girl appearing at the doorway as he drew near. Their eyes met, and, for a moment, there flashed into those of the girl a gleam of real pleasure, such as is kept for an acquaintance who is genuinely liked. It was followed by a very pretty confusion, the girl's rounded cheeks flushing a rosy pink under their delicate tan.

"Good morning, Miss Hope," Heweitt greeted her, removing his Stetson. "You are well, I hope, and your father?"

She told him that her father was out along with the boys.

"Are you alone, then?" he asked curiously.

Tom Marley, as he knew, was a widower, and of his daughter, Hope, Heweitt had some knowledge. It was easy to recall the day, some three months before, when he had been one of a surprise party that had descended upon Tom Marley's ranch with a supply of grub enough to feed a troop of cavalry and of high spirits that were a guarantee against early retirement to sleep. A dance had followed as a matter of course. Heweitt, a good dancer, had quickly made the discovery that Hope Marley's step suited his own, and he had given much opportunity for jealousy amongst the other young men by his monopoly of her.

His question had been not altogether disingenuous. He had put it with a certain curiosity as to whether she would admit no other occupant of the house. His eyes were sharp, and he had not missed, and did not need to be told, the meaning of the involuntary, half-frightened expression that had so quickly followed the welcome in the girl's clear hazel grey eyes. Without being told, he knew it as a fact that the mounted police had been at the house, and had informed Tom Marley that Heweitt was wanted.

Hope nodded in reply to his question.

For a short space there was silence, the girl shyly regarding Heweitt and he staring at her, one part of his brain engaged with the charming picture she made, with the sunlight slantwise upon her abundant, glossy brown hair and simple frock of blue print.

Suddenly he pulled himself together.

"Then I believe I'll not come in," he said gravely, and added, "as your father or brothers are not about."

"But——" she began with a little grimace of dismay; and then stopped in some confusion.

He smiled faintly. "It's of no consequence really

—nothing of importance,” he assured her. “Good morning, Miss Hope.”

With a lift of his hat, he carried his left hand away to the left, and the pony wheeled as required.

His hunger was fierce, his fasting having extended nearly to thirty-six hours, but he was not going into that house. It would be dead easy to enter and help himself to all he wanted; Hope would offer no opposition, of that he felt assured, but, partly because it would be so easy, he could not do it. Hope Marley was a nice girl; she was alone; and he did not mean getting her into trouble. She was no frail slip of a girl; and Canadian women are not expected to faint at the sight of a mouse. If, however, it were known later that the house had been entered by Heweitt, the outlaw, while she was there, it might be said—some one would be sure to say it—that she had been a willing party, had not scrupled to assist her lover against the police.

The pony had not made ten paces from the entrance when the rider heard the quick pattering of feet behind.

He half turned, as Hope Marley ran up abreast and laid an impulsive hand on his sleeve.

“Oh, why did you go away? Won’t you please turn round and come right in?” she asked confusedly, half-eager, half-hesitating, as though not altogether sure of herself. Her breath was coming quickly, and the colour in her cheek was deeper. “Breakfast is over, I know; but I—I mean, it is early and you cannot—and—and, and you must be hungry. It won’t take me more than a few minutes. Father and the boys——”

She stopped, wide-eyed, more than a little frightened, very pretty in her genuine distress. Heweitt, the pony checked, looked gravely down into the limpid brown eyes, very full, long lashed, a hint

of gathering moisture increasing their almost plaintive expression. Under his steady gaze her confusion increased, her hurried, timid expostulations ceased abruptly.

"I think not, Miss Hope," he told her, the beginning of a smile about his mouth. "You see, in the circumstances it—it might not be altogether—convenient."

His eyes gave thanks, but his head told him that she was unwise. Those who gave assistance to unfortunates "wanted" by the law are regarded with pronounced disfavour, and the risk is one not lightly to be undertaken. To allow this open-hearted, defenceless girl to take upon herself a risk of the nature of which she might well be ignorant did not square with Heweitt's conception of what is right and honourable.

Hope stood silent, her eyes downcast. Suddenly she lifted her face to his, her eyes bright with simulated resentment. An idea had come to her. Perhaps her resentment was not entirely simulated.

"When did you eat last?" she demanded; and the question, so little expected, took him by surprise.

"Yesterday," he answered, surprised into the truth.

"Then what do you mean by saying it is not convenient you should come in for a meal? I should think it is very necessary."

"Perhaps; but——"

"But there aren't any 'buts'," she interrupted decisively. "Don't be so foolish, Mr. Heweitt. Not convenient! Now that's real silly of you. Whatever can you mean?" she ran on, with as obvious an air of wonder and inquiry as she could command. "You ought to know that it isn't inconvenient to get a meal for a friend, even though he wasn't expected. Do come right back now this minute and:

sit down while I get you something, or you'll make me ashamed of myself. Don't you think father would be hurt if he knew of your acting this way? What do you suppose he would say to me if he knew I'd let you go away hungry?"

It was earnestly meant, well enough done, but the girl was too ingenuous to deceive with success. Heweitt was not deceived. The police had been to the ranch all right. The start of surprise, the look of apprehension in Hope's eyes when they first fell upon him, had already told him as much, and her lips were not going to give the lie to these involuntary revelations of the truth.

He glanced at her swiftly, his eyes narrowing. Had he deceived himself? Was there another reason behind her apparent anxiety to take the risk of voluntarily supplying him with food? Was it possible that this was a trap laid for him? That Tom Marley and his boys, perhaps even the police, were near, and would corner him as soon as he was safely within the house? It might be that this girl was an unwilling decoy; that her evident confusion belonged rather to nervousness than to guilt, but a decoy none the less.

The unworthy suspicion died as quickly as it was conceived. One glance at the purity of the face in front of him proved it to be a lie. With a swift revulsion of feeling he mentally cursed himself for even suspecting such a foulness.

He felt ashamed; and in his shame, were it only to prove how ignoble had been his suspicion, there was the temptation to accept Hope's invitation.

Hunger lent its persuasive voice.

Hesitation showed in his face, and Hope, seeing it, renewed her urging.

"Come, Mr. Heweitt," she protested; "you ought not to want so much persuasion to see that it isn't

friendly to go away without even coming into our house. Besides, you intended to at first, you know."

"Thank you all the same, Miss Hope; but I don't think I will," he answered.

Temptation had been overcome.

For the sake of his own self-respect, he would give no opportunity for it to be said that he had taken advantage of a woman's helplessness or goodwill.

He shook his head, emphasizing his refusal.

Seeing him obdurate, Hope Marley took her courage in both hands, though betraying the secret she would have given all she possessed to have been able to keep. The wounded look left her eyes, and with face suddenly pale, she leaned towards him.

"No one will ever know," she said, almost in a whisper.

"It would be as well no one ever should know, eh?" he answered, smiling.

And at that her face became as scarlet. Then the blood ebbed back to her heart, and despair clouded her eyes, and her breast heaved.

Heweitt's resolution to take no advantage of her weakness and isolation, his readiness for her sake to forego the chance to help himself to all that he wanted so badly, was proof sufficient for her feminine mind that he was undeserving of the reputation inferred by the name with which the law had branded him. With what might be his offence she had no concern. Woman-like, she relied upon her intuitions. Her impulse was to serve him, and he refused. She made one more effort.

"Guess I'd better be going, Miss Hope," he said, gently.

"But not as you are," she cried vehemently. "You need food. There are other things too. My brother's rifle is in the house. You need not come in; I'll bring them to you."

The exasperating man was not to be persuaded. It was true that he was in need, but not badly enough to consent to her taking risks. He would try his luck elsewhere.

"But believe me, Miss Hope," he said earnestly, and his hand rested upon her shoulder. "Believe me that I mean nothing churlish by my refusal. I want you to believe that I do most sincerely appreciate your goodness. I shall never forget it. It makes me a proud and happy man——"

But Hope was not listening to him. Her head was turned away to hide the angry tears glistening in her eyes. And then a loud exclamation interrupted him. Excitement leapt into her face.

"There! There! Don't you see?" she cried in terror. "And now it is too late!"

Heweitt, at once on the alert, turned his head. Swiftly his keen eyes picked up the cause of the girl's impetuous outburst. Half a mile distant showed the tunics of three mounted troopers, probably returning from the house of Tom Marley's only neighbour in the valley.

"What will you do?" asked Hope in a whisper.

Heweitt decided that in a couple of seconds. To streak out on the dead-run would bring him into full view of the police. Cover close at hand must be found, and found quickly. The place where he had lain overnight would serve, and he could reach it without being seen. In a dozen crisp words he told the girl—he could not have explained why—the location of this hiding place.

"So long, Miss Hope. I'll see you again," he said, and stooping so that the upper half of his body was lying along his pony's neck, he went.

Inside five minutes he was snugly ensconced in his hiding-place. There he believed himself safe, since it was unlikely the police were aware of his appear-

ance in the locality. Therefore, they would be making no close search.

He was within the thick brush crowning a knoll overlooking Marley's house. By peering between the foliage he was able to watch the three men as they headed for the ranch. But before they reached it a strange sight met his eyes. Between the house and the troopers a light coloured patch—Hope Marley in her blue frock—was moving at a run towards the men.

"Now what in thunder?" began Heweitt, completely bewildered, "What's she doing that for?"

And a ghastly fear—which was not fear for himself—seized his heart. Good God! Was it possible—after all she had said—Delilah, again!

For half a minute he forgot to breathe, so intent was his whole being upon the four tiny distant figures.

And then he saw the three horsemen get on the move, taking a line that would lead them in an opposite direction to that where he was concealed.

"She's put them off!" he cried aloud.

He sprang erect, every nerve and fibre tingling with a novel excitement. She knew that he, Steve Heweitt, was proscribed by the Law: that he was guilty of some crime putting him outside the pale of every honest person's friendship and help; yet she had intervened and imperilled her safety to help him.

"By Heaven! but that's a woman!" he cried.

There flashed into his brain recollection of that other woman in England, weak as water, ignorant, unstable, incapable of sincerity, who, prompt to do a venal parent's bidding, quick to the lure of material gain, had gone back on her pledged word—and made him what he was.

Hidden by the tall brush, Steve Heweitt watched the riders become absorbed in the yellowish grey of the plains. When they had finally disappeared,

he made ready to move. What Hope Marley had done for him was surely worth a "Thank you." Carried away by a fine enthusiasm, he led out his pony with the intention of going down to say it.

He was swinging into the saddle when something happened that brought a curse to his lips and his intention to naught. On the dead run across the meadows into which they emerged from a flank of wood came stringing half a dozen horsemen—Tom Marley and his boys—bound for the ranch-house.

It was too great a risk. Tom Marley and his boys might not be prepared to think the same as Hope. As unobtrusively as possible Heweitt hurried back along the trail he had taken the evening before.

Five hours later, with his belt almost cutting him in halves, he achieved a meal by the simple expedient of entering a temporarily vacated shack and helping himself. Some queer instinct against petty larceny being still active, he left the shack with no more food than he had cooked and eaten, although plenty was to hand and his grub for the next day not obvious.

What he did not guess was that, about the same time, Hope Marley, a forlorn and unhappy maiden, was standing by the hiding place he had recently quitted. Her father and the boys had stayed for a meal; and the rancher, unconvinced by his daughter's derisive assurance that she wasn't in the least afraid of being left alone in the house, Steve Heweitt notwithstanding, had insisted upon her brother Joe remaining behind while the rest departed on their several occupations. When Joe at last had been strategically removed from the house, Hope filled a basket with food, hunted cartridges for the Winchester he had not taken with him, and had carried basket and rifle to the top of the wooded knoll.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in dismay, finding neither sight nor sound of the man she sought.

She made search, only to be quickly convinced that Heweitt had actually gone. Miserably she went back and stared at the flattened greenery amid which he had crouched.

"Oh!" she cried again. "And he was so hungry!"

Unchecked, the tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. She sighed, feeling more unhappy than ever in her life.

"I do hope they won't catch him!" she told herself, whispering the words as though fearful that even the leaves should overhear.

CHAPTER VI

ROBBERY UNDER ARMS

LATE in the succeeding afternoon, Heweitt was following the downward course of the river through the North Fork valley when he overtook a traveller on foot, a tall, trimly built young man, dressed in a picturesque hunting suit, and carrying a double-barrelled gun which at once seized Heweitt's attention and forthwith caused him to break the tenth commandment. This was plainly no native of-whom to be suspicious.

"Good afternoon," he said cheerily, as he drew alongside.

"Good afternoon."

"English obviously—sportsman—doesn't seem to be quite certain where he is," was the outlaw's quick mental sizing-up of his companion; and he was correct.

"Er—I say"—the breed was recognizable at once—"you—er—know these parts pretty well, I presume?"

"I've been this way before," Heweitt admitted.

"Then could you—er—be so good as to—er—tell me where I am?"

"North Fork Valley, and at present travelling south-east," replied Heweitt literally.

"Ah, thanks," said the other vaguely; and then in a burst of confidence: "D'you know I've been

tramping about this blessed place for hours and find my camp I can't."

Heweitt said: "Can't you remember where your camp was fixed?"

The sportsman frowned. "I thought I could; but every spot here seems so confoundedly alike to every other that I seem to have—er—become slightly confused. Thought you might—er—be able to assist me, y'know, being a—er—native, eh? I'd be confoundedly obliged to you, my man, if you could be of any assistance."

Behind his handkerchief Heweitt concealed a smile. This was going to be too easy.

"Are you alone, sir?" he asked. "Shooting trip, I suppose?"

"Yes. Heard a deuce of a lot talked about this part of the world—a fine game country, y'know; so thought I'd have a look at it. Of course I have a guide—camp waggon, tent an' all that, y'know," explained the young fellow, in happy ignorance of the particular and increasing interest he was exciting in his companion. "And that's just the trouble," he went on, somewhat resentfully. "Went out this morning after antelope, and we separated when we got somewhere about here. Guide said it was the proper thing to do. But the confounded fellow hasn't turned up or I misunderstood him and went to the wrong place, or he's lying asleep somewhere, confound him! And so, y'see, I've—er—got lost. Infernal nuisance."

"Sure it is," agreed Heweitt gravely. "Didn't you fire your gun?"

"That was the arrangement. Two quick shots—signal of distress kind of business—if I should want him. Might have been all right if an accident hadn't happened. Had a slip—tripped over some beastly root or something, and the gun suffered."

He took the weapon from under his arm and showed Heweitt. Both hammers had been badly strained out of alignment and the lever had jammed. Down came Heweitt's hopes to the earth with a run. His companion was not going to prove so profitable as anticipated. But the cunning of the Ishmaelite came to his assistance, and, Antæus-like, hope rose to its feet reanimated.

"Well, it doesn't seem so bad but that it might be worse," Heweitt said kindly. "We won't worry about your guide, he can take care of himself. He'll turn up all right. What is his name? Maybe I know him?"

"Ben Carter. I picked him up at the Hudson's Bay post from where I—er—started my trip. I forget the name of the place."

Heweitt shook his head. "Carter! don't know him. Now we'll go back along the trail you've come so far as you can remember it," he said briskly; "and try to work out approximately where your camp's likely to be. Recollect where the sun was when you started?"

Yes, the sportsman remembered that all right—or believed he did. They started up the valley and his memory contrived to supply a few more details.

Before forty minutes had passed Heweitt had decided upon the probable location of the camp, for which he started with a confidence that aroused the secret admiration of his companion. The confidence was justified.

The camp was pitched at the upper end of a small gorge, in a meadow through which ran a stream. The sportsman was grateful and said so. He was wondering what kind of tip the service warranted. He was an Englishman.

"Decent chap, but I shouldn't say he's any too well off," had been his summing up of Heweitt.

The latter's satisfaction was not so apparent. Not

far from the waggon he saw a man at work close to a generous fire. A third man struck him as an inconvenience.

"Your guide evidently reckoned you'd get back all right some time," he said, coming to a standstill.

"Guide! Eh? Oh that's not my guide," came the answer. "A fellow I brought along to do the cooking. Awful fool; afraid of his own shadow, but he cooks like an angel."

Heweitt became more amiable. The scheme he had been engaged in concocting did not include serious violence, for which reason he was not anxious to meet the guide.

"You'll—er—come down into camp with me?" suggested the Englishman, seeing Heweitt start his pony moving.

"Why, sure I will," the outlaw said readily.

He meant going down into the camp. He had his own reasons, besides being shrewdly confident what was passing in the sportsman's mind. Compensation for services rendered, but he had given his companion credit for feeling a trifle doubtful how it was to be done.

"You'll er—stay—an' have a meal with me, won't you?" the young man asked hospitably, having made up his mind that, in spite of appearances, his rescuer might be of the stamp which finds the matter of tipping prickly, unless handled diplomatically. "I'm devilishly hungry myself—not a bite since breakfast, you know. We won't wait for my guide."

"You're very kind," Heweitt assured him.

"That's right." They had come near to the tent by now. "Jimmy, my friend here will stay and—er—dine with me. How soon will food be ready?"

"Soon as you are, boss," the cook answered promptly.

He was a nervous-looking, furtive-eyed lad; a half-breed obviously, gaunt, with straight, ragged black hair, scared eyes, and a general air of apology. He seemed to have known an existence in which blows were prevalent, and was astonished at the absence of abuse when addressed.

But he could cook; his employer's pronouncement upon his culinary talent was not exaggerated. Steve Heweitt found himself doing full justice to a meal such as would not have disgraced more elaborate surroundings.

"Do you know, you talk almost like an Englishman," suddenly observed the tenderfoot, when, the meal despatched, pipes were lighted.

"Indeed?" smiled Heweitt.

"Yes; at first I was afraid you were—er—a Yankee," the young man confessed.

He was beginning to think he liked his guest, who certainly appeared to know a great deal that was interesting, who talked with only a perceptible twang, and who neither shoved his knife into his mouth nor wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

"Won't find many Yankees out in this direction—Westerners, yes," Heweitt assured him. "As for England—well, yes, there was a time when I thought I had some claim upon her."

"An Englishman! Really now, that's confoundedly interesting," declared the tenderfoot delightedly, and at once making up his mind that a tip was out of the question. "How jolly! Now the Yankee, he's—er—quite impossible. I spent over a fortnight in the States before comin' along here. Don't like 'em. Canadians aren't so bad," declared the critic with an air of patronage that his listener found diverting. "But though I suppose it sounds like—er—insular prejudice an' all that—I say, 'Give me the Englishman.'"

His age might have been twenty-two years—hardly more.

“I dare say you’re right,” murmured Heweitt.

“I’m sure of it. As for the women of other countries——” the speaker became judicially enthusiastic —“they’re not to be compared. In beauty and—er—charm, all that sort of thing; in every respect, the—er—the Englishwoman is—simply unapproachable.”

“She is—in *some* things.” Heweitt, speaking with much emphasis, sat suddenly upright. “There are a few women in this country, for instance, whom I wouldn’t go to the trouble of comparing with any Englishwoman. Like the shooting, eh? I suppose by the way, sir, that you brought a good battery along with you. If I may, I should much like to see your weapons.”

“Why, certainly; with pleasure.”

It was not by accident that Heweitt had switched off to a different topic of conversation. He had enjoyed the meal; he had found the company of the tenderfoot mildly diverting; but it would be taking too great a risk to prolong his entertainment much further. Any moment might see the return of the guide; and Heweitt felt he could exist very well without making Ben Carter’s acquaintance.

With alacrity the tenderfoot stepped across to the waggon, and presently Heweitt was examining with interest as extensive—and expensive—an armoury as any gunmaker could wish to provide for a wealthy customer. Shot guns, rifles of various calibre, repeaters—it was a real *embarras des richesses*.

To make choice was no easy matter, but after careful examination Heweitt held up his selection.

“Guess I’ll have this one,” he said in a quiet voice, raising his head.

You could have counted slowly up to twenty while the two men looked full into each other’s eyes, those

of the outlaw suddenly grown hard beneath their down-drawn brows, the young Englishman's wide with astonishment. The movement of Heweitt's right hand and its disappearance had not been noticed. What he had said had been more than sufficient to hold all his hearer's attention. There was nothing to show that Heweitt was armed; but his coat was open, and the long-barrelled Colt could be pulled without hitch from where it lay back of his hip.

The tenderfoot was the first to break the tense silence.

"Eh?" he said, uncomprehending.

"I said I'll take this one," Heweitt repeated. "It'll suit me better than the rest."

"But—er—why?"

"Because I need it, that's why," returned Heweitt, and some glimmering of the truth must have lighted the other's brain.

And yet he hesitated to give it credence.

"I say! Is it—er—a joke?" he asked feebly.

"It may be for you—you've shooting irons and to spare," replied Heweitt grimly, not shifting his gaze by a hairline. "I haven't one, and it's dead earnest for me."

Then the tenderfoot really understood, and like most of his type and breed, he acted impulsively.

"I'll be dashed! A road agent!" he got out.

And as he shouted he jumped to cover the few feet between his hands and his spoiler. Fortunately, he was dealing with one who meant no unnecessary mischief.

As he jumped, Heweitt stepped back a pace, drawing the Colt simultaneously, and the tenderfoot pulled up with a jerk, the small circlet of steel within ten inches of his forehead. Having no expectation of shooting, the outlaw could afford this somewhat theatrical gesture.

"Don't be a fool," he advised gently. "This isn't play-acting. I'm dead serious, but I'd much rather that you didn't get hurt. Take it quietly. It's no discredit to you. I mean having this rifle of yours and I guess your life is more valuable to you than your property."

The tenderfoot let out a deep breath. He was not scared, although this was the first time in his life that he had met eye to eye with a man who meant killing. Chiefly he was suffering from the shock of unmitigated surprise. He was thinking fast, faster than ever he had thought before—calculating chances.

"No," interrupted Heweitt, anticipating him. "It's no use your looking to Jimmy. Stay though, we'll call him up. I want him."

He called himself, and the half-bred lad came running. As the outlaw's back was turned to him, he did not realize the situation until it was too late for him to run with safety. Besides, he had almost got rid of the natural impulse to escape trouble, having painfully learned submission.

"Jimmy," commanded Heweitt; "I'm not staying in this camp for the sake of my health, neither is it convenient to prolong my visit. Just tie up your boss, and do it quick."

"Oh, come now!" protested Jimmy's boss, flushing.

"You're too dangerous to leave loose, especially with all this artillery around," Heweitt complimented him.

Inside three minutes the tenderfoot was securely tied up and lashed to the waggon-wheel, leaving Heweitt free to complete his arrangements. Putting back his Colt (it would have been a gratuitous humiliation of a plucky youngster to have told him that every chamber of the weapon was empty, the last cartridge expended forty-eight hours before) he took

the submissive Jimmy in hand and fastened him up similarly.

"It won't be for long," he reassured his victims.

"The guide will certainly be here before dark."

He was afraid he would arrive too soon, so he limited himself to searching the waggon for food for his newly-acquired rifle and, as he could find no ammunition suitable to his Colt, he added to his plunder a five-shot .38 Smith and Wesson he happened upon. It was hardly a fair exchange, but he was philosopher enough to admit that beggars could not be choosers.

With an interest he made no effort to conceal, the rightful owner of the property watched this confiscation of his goods, but without saying a word. From the moment when he was sat down with his back to the waggon-wheel, he made no sound. When, however, he saw Hewitt, his preparations concluded, move off to where the horses were staked, curiosity got the better of him.

"I say," he called. Hewitt halted, turned, and went to him.

"Well?"

"What are you, really?" the prisoner inquired; "if it's not a rude question."

Hewitt smiled, but not with humour. His violation of hospitality made him feel disgusted and ashamed of himself.

"Well," he answered, "the law calls me an outlaw, and I'm living up to the name."

"An outlaw!" The tenderfoot's eyebrows went up. "By Jove! an outlaw! How frightfully interesting! But you said you were an Englishman."

Evidently he was not considering the two terms compatible.

"Just so."

"And what is your name?"

Hewitt grinned. "If you'll trouble to read the

Western newspapers, in all probability you'll see it mentioned one of these near days," he returned grimly. "Sorry I've had to tie you up, but it couldn't be helped. So long!" and he turned away to get his pony.

Steve Heweitt was advancing.

For robbery under arms is a serious offence—~~for~~ more so than roping a policeman and evading arrest.

CHAPTER VII.

BILL

IF anyone had suggested to Heweitt that he had fallen in love with Hope Marley he would have laughed. But Hope had plainly shown that she was anxious the police should not get him. It was, therefore, up to him, for her sake as well as his own, to take mighty good care the police did not lay him by the heels.

After the looting at the hunting-camp in the North Fork valley Heweitt disappeared into the Back of Nowhere—actually located not far from the scene of the English sportsman's mishap. He argued that that young man, thinking of his lost property, would lose no time in making an appeal to the Law. With the cunning of the hunted, Heweitt further argued that the last place in which it would be supposed he had found a hiding-place was the neighbourhood of his latest exploit.

It was good hiding-ground he selected. The country was broken, there was game in plenty and grass for his pony. For some time he remained undisturbed.

It was lonely, and lonesomeness is apt to breed queer ideas. A man left to himself will put in too much time thinking exclusively of himself. Steve Heweitt found it so. But the life of an outlaw is a life of action, and something had to be done, Heweitt

decided, and with him the something was to hold up the Edmonton stage.

His reason was the need of money. He had been in safe hiding more than a fortnight when he came to the conclusion that the best thing was to get out of the country. For that money was an absolute necessity.

Heweitt crossed the railroad without attracting attention, and in a couple of days found himself in a well-wooded, well-watered country, not yet unduly tame. It was hereabouts he happened on Bill. Bill must have had another name, but as it never transpired, it was plain Bill that Heweitt learned to call him.

He found Bill lying beside a rapidly drying water-course, some sixty miles from the railroad, and a hundred and twenty from everywhere else. At first Heweitt believed the creature was dead, and it was sheer curiosity that caused him to dismount to look at the body. He discovered the fellow was merely dead drunk—rather in the earliest stage of recovery.

“How did you get here?” Heweitt demanded, when he had soused and shaken and punched the object into something like consciousness.

But Bill—as he profanely intimated his name to be—could not say, due to the demijohn—empty and almost certainly stolen—lying beside him. He was not clean, in spite of the many baths inflicted upon him. He was foul of tongue, dubious in his facts, and sparing with the truth.

Bill's language was a novelty to Heweitt, although the average puncher is no slouch in that line when properly excited. After the first demonstration, he would gladly have left the wastrel to his own devices; but he had not the heart, Bill being obviously unfit to take care of himself. His garments were deplorable; he had no blankets, no shred of food, and fortunately;

perhaps, no weapons. Heweitt admitted to himself his own obvious disqualifications as a rescue worker, but to abandon Bill he felt would be next door to cold-blooded murder. Besides, Bill promised amendments.

Fifty times during the first twenty-four hours did Heweitt curse himself for a fool. Bill had fewer and worse morals than a mongrel dog. For choice, as a companion, the outlaw would have preferred the mongrel. But Bill was more difficult to dispose of than a dog would have been.

Disgusted the whole time, but consoled by the thought that Hope Marley would approve, could she know, Heweitt delayed his journey, camped, and did his best with food, baths, and other necessities to make his companion somewhat less obnoxious.

On the third evening, with Heweitt sitting well to windward by the fire, Bill grew communicative.

"It was all along of a woman I come to this 'ole," he suddenly volunteered.

Heweitt told him curtly to cut out as many of the superfluous adjectives as possible and explain. There was little else he had to be curious about, and more than once he had wondered what means had conveyed this undersized, wicked-mouthed, inconstant-eyed, weak-lunged fragment of London's vicious scum to insult the glorious landscape of Western Canada.

"It was a woman," repeated Bill. "Leastways, a gal. Damn 'er!"

"That'll do," interrupted Heweitt, threateningly.

"Didn't know you was a Sunday School bloke—don't sound like it sometimes," returned Bill, impudently, with a wary eye for the anticipated retaliatory movement. "Crikey! wotjer say when I was takin' a squint at that bit of paper wot fell outer yer pocket last night?"

Eighteen hours before, Heweitt had waked suddenly to find his companion in the act of reading a letter

by the light of the declining fire. Bill whiningly explained that he had found the letter lying on the ground, and natural curiosity had prompted him to have a look at it. Heweitt was more certain that the fellow's inquisitiveness concerning the man who had befriended him had caused him to get up in the middle of the night and investigate his pockets.

Punishment had followed swiftly, and Heweitt had further threatened to turn the rascal adrift if the light-fingered experiment were repeated. Bill had taken the blows in sullen silence, as one well-used to such, and had called all his gods to witness that he was innocent. With tears in his eyes he had begged Heweitt not to send him away.

Heweitt felt himself a brute to lift his hand against so pitiful a creature.

"Don't you worry about what I say, but just see to it that you cut out the bad language when you're talking to me," he said, autocratically, in answer to Bill's reproof. "Get on."

"Righto! Well, I said that if it 'adn't been for that bloomin' gal—father kept a fried-fish shop in 'Oxton—I wouldn't be in this blighted 'ole," went on Bill. He gave the impression of considering himself extremely ill-used. "Wanted to know why I couldn't give 'er the things wot some blokes gives their gals. Seemed to fink as a bloke's oof wasn't meant for nothin' more'n fings on a gal's 'ead or back. 'Why ain't yer got more money, Bill?' she used to say to me. 'Cos I ain't, that's why,' I'd tell 'er. 'Well,' she says, 'eighteen shillin's a week in a sweet fact'ry ain't enough for me an' chance it. That Bill 'Opkins makes 'is thirty-five reg'lar an' young Ginger Davis makes 'is quids an' fivers easy as wink. Why can't you?' That's wot she'd say again and again, till I got fair sick of 'earin' it. Strewth I did. An' didn't I work, too? Twelve hours a day in that

bloomin' fact'ry. But I got more'n the eighteen bob I told 'er about," and he winked knowingly at his listener. "Don't do wiv a gal. I was a maker——"

"A what?" Heweitt interrupted.

"Maker. Uster make the bloomin' suckers. Can't you understand plain English?—an' there was the chance to put a bit of stuff away now an' again for my own benefit—sellin' on my own, you know. But that Bill 'Opkins was a plumber, an' you know wot *those* blokes makes on the QT. As for Ginger, 'e was a fightin' man, an' Emmer must have been a bloomin' mug if she thought I could do anythink at that game." He laughed sardonically.

"So because Emma wasn't satisfied with what you were earning, you emigrated here to see if you could do better, eh?" suggested Heweitt.

Of course, Bill was an offensive beast, and an untrustworthy one at that; but Steve Heweitt had already made acquaintance with one of the penalties attached to neglect of the existence of the law. Upon the range, although slackness of jaw is not one of the cowpuncher's failings, there is some conversation, but the hunted dweller in the wilds, with no occupation save the preservation of his freedom, finds little communion with his fellows. Sooner or later, the loneliness, the enforced dumbness, the oppression of the great silence amid which he exists, makes itself felt.

Of late, Heweitt had dropped into the habit of talking to himself, a bad sign, and he knew it. Even the company of such as Bill was not without its compensation.

"Yus, I come out 'ere. An' strewth! what a bloomin' fool I was," replied Bill, fiercely. "Wot's this place good for I'd like t'know! Wish I was dead, I do. Slavin' worse'n a bloomin' moke; bullied 'ere, kicked there—Lord! the bloomin' miles I

tramped, too, an' on an empty belly. 'Tain't a bloomin'-dawg's life."

"And how did you come to get out here—where I found you?"

"Come in a bloomin' Pullman, o' course, wiv flunkies a 'andin' round bottles of fizz an' big Basses an' cigars an' ices an' peaches. 'Ow else jer think I come, eh?" cried Bill savagely, his narrow, unwholesome-looking face growing dark. "Don't I look like it?"

He rolled over on his back, staring blankly at the soft bluish-black sky, pitted with tiny points of light, the night breeze gently swaying the branches of the willows.

"I 'ope that ruddy brakeman wot chucked me off went strite to 'ell that same night—'im an' all the rest o' the bloomin' crew," he cried with sudden viciousness, sitting up again. "Crikey! 'Ow I laughed when I 'eard there'd bin an accident, but I didn't stop to 'ear who'd copped it. Some fools went off to 'elp, but that wasn't yours truly; not 'arf."

"You took the opportunity of stealing the whisky and clearing off?"

"That was good, that bloomin' whisky," chuckled Bill, reminiscently. And then he suddenly leaped to his feet, a ragged, disgusting, half-starved thief, his little eyes flaming with violent passion. "Why in 'ell jer want to interfere with me?" he screeched. "I'd been 'appy for two days; 'appier than ever I been since I set foot in this cursed country; and I'd a died that night—died 'appy an' contented, I would, if it 'adn't been for you, you interferin' blasted—"

He was swept away by a storm of uncontrollable passion and vile profanity that all his physical fear of Hewitt could not check. His bent knees quivered; he was shaking from head to foot with rage, begotten of his feeling of injury. Even when gripped and

soundly shaken, the horrible words continued to jerk from between his clicking teeth, until he suddenly went limp and collapsed on the ground.

"You'll go your own way to-morrow, you ungrateful devil. I've finished with you," Heweitt told him sternly.

But Bill made no rejoinder. He lay on his chest, his face buried in his arms, coughing.

Throughout the night Heweitt remained awake; for he believed Bill fully capable of cutting the pony's hobbles and sending it adrift, or of using his clasp knife for an even worse purpose. But the miserable creature hardly stirred. Hour after hour he remained inert, only his frequent muffled coughing making it clear that he was neither asleep nor dead. He did not move when, at cocklight, Heweitt drew the fire together, and put up a meal. He took no notice of the food and drink set down for him; but when Heweitt, the fire stamped out and the ashes scattered, was about to mount his pony and ride off, Bill showed that he was still alive.

With an open clasp knife in his hand, he ran excitedly after Heweitt and grabbed at the head of the cayuse.

"If you don't take me along o' you, Gawd's strewth! but I cuts my bloomin' throat this very second," he panted hoarsely. "I mean it. You saved me; you gotter keep me."

For a while, with mixed feelings, Heweitt considered the distorted face, the glittering eyes for the moment unshifting. Then—

"Now see here——" he began.

"I mean it. My Gawd, I mean it!" said Bill, his head nodding.

"Oh, damn it all, come along then," the outlaw said abruptly, in helpless exasperation.

He knew himself for seventeen different kinds of a

fool. He knew that he would regret the decision a dozen times every day. Yet the horrible earnestness in the creature's face was too much for him.

"Guess I've made a damn fool of myself," was his inward comment.

And yet, somehow, he was not feeling wholly dissatisfied. It seemed to him that a girl with appealing hazel-grey eyes and glossy brown hair with whom he had talked once, would approve of his action.

"Put that knife away and get a move on you," he growled aloud.

Bill said not a word—did not even look grateful, but he put the knife out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HOLD-UP

LATE in the afternoon, with Bill tramping doggedly behind, Heweitt dropped over a wooded ridge down towards a wide-reaching valley between two outlying spurs of the Knee Hills. Suddenly a thought occurred to him. The grass in the valley was rich and luxuriant, beginning to take on a golden shade. Someone had already correctly viewed its advantages, for within a couple of hundred yards of a creek that wound through the valley lay a fair-sized ranch-house with sheds and corrals. It was an ideal spot for horses and cattle, and the sight of some animals feeding gave Heweitt the idea.

"But we can't go on this way," he said to Bill suddenly. "You'll have to get a horse."

"Ho yus, an' pay for it wiv an I.O.U.—I can see the bloke a-takin' it," answered Bill readily.

He appeared to have recovered his normal impudence, though since the start of the day's journey he had not once opened his mouth.

"No need for an I.O.U., Bill," Heweitt said. "You see that house yonder below?"

"Barn an' pigsties around it? Yus, I see it," said Bill.

"Well, there'll be horses there for sure. Maybe they'll sell you one. They won't cheat you too bad, I guess."

He handed Bill—who stared at him, grinning—all the money he had except five dollars, and carefully impressed upon him the spot where he would wait for Bill to rejoin him.

“That bit o’ forest? Righto!” said Bill, and he departed, still grinning.

“Now if I’m correct in my notions,” said Heweitt to himself as he took the cayuse gently along to the spot indicated, “Bill will get that horse—or will not get it—it doesn’t matter much which, and then he’ll put in a whole lot of time avoiding meeting me again.”

None the less, when he came to the “bit o’ forest,” a poplar grove of several score acres extent, he dismounted, lighted his pipe, and sat down to think about the business immediately ahead—the holding up of the Edmonton stage.

He wondered how it would pan out. So far as he had been able to gather, if a man had the requisite nerve, there was really little or no danger, small risk of failure. Bill had threatened to introduce a disagreeable complication, but that had been removed. He was satisfied Bill had no notion of the real character of the man who had saved him from death, and it was desirable that Bill should remain ignorant. Those dollars with which he’d just parted had been well invested.

Before long he was aroused by an unmistakable sound, the measured beat of a horse’s hoofs. At once he was on his feet, alert, vigilant. In a few seconds he was able to get a glimpse of the approaching animal.

The rider was Bill.

“Damn!” exclaimed Heweitt with intense feeling.

At a gallop Bill came up to the fringe of timber, yelled “Coo-e-e!” at the top of his voice, dismounted, and walked to meet the outlaw. There was a wide

grin on his face. He had the air of a man greatly pleased with himself.

"What-er you think of 'im?" he inquired, exhibiting his purchase. "Ain't so bad, I reckon. Thought they'd got a bloomin' mug to play with, but they 'adn't. Ain't such a bloomin' fool 's 'e looks is yours. truly, an' don't yer forgit it. Was a 'orse washer for an omnibus company once, an' once I drove a cab. 'Ere y' are, guv'nor"

And to Heweitt's immense astonishment he handed back eight of the dollars given him.

With something of a sigh Heweitt accepted the money and the situation. Doing good was a prickly business anyway, and apt to give a man as many bad hours as downright wrong.

"Don't seem as 'appy an' proud o' my 'orse dealin' as yer might be, ole cockalorum," remarked Bill.

Heweitt did not reply, and soon they were jogging along side by side, Bill in the best of humours, Heweitt scowling.

During the week that followed, some improvement was noticeable in Bill. He did not require to be checked so frequently for the unlicensed use of his tongue. He made himself useful in the matter of the nightly fire, although he remained untrustworthy in the matter of cooking; he was useful in looking after the horses. In appearance he certainly improved, consequent upon regular meals and the withholding of ardent spirits.

But Heweitt's trust in him did not grow; while his worry to know what to do with him did.

Once the queerly-paired companions fell in with a police patrol. At least, Bill did. He had nothing to fear, and Heweitt, who had seen the enemy in time, had no hesitation in seeking his safety in a hurried concealment. Rejoining Bill an hour later he found him looking not a little bewildered and hurt.

"Wot yer want to bunk off like that for?" he demanded in an aggrieved voice.

"I remembered there was nothing for supper," Heweitt answered mendaciously.

"Ho! that's it, is it?" returned Bill, with a side-long look.

"Mounted policeman have anything to say?" queried Heweitt easily. "Those fellows are usually good for a yarn."

"P'liceman! Oh, yer means that chap. Well 'e wanted to know who I was, an' wot I was doin'. Bloomin' impudence," said Bill gruffly.

"And you told him?"

"Told 'im I was a bloomin' fool who'd been brought over to 'is forsaken country on false pretences an' wanted to get out quick. An' 'e said did I mean climbin' over the North Pole to git 'ome. Ruddy sauce! Asked who was wiv me, an' I told 'im 'e was a 'bloomin' liar; I was on my own. Wot's that ruddy thing yer got there? Rabbit? Never did care about rabbit, unless I'd got plenty of onions wiv it."

The evening of the second day after this happening Bill came near to getting his companion into serious trouble. They hit Lochinvar, a remote settlement, and Heweitt was willing to take the risk of entering, meaning to buy coffee. For more than a month he had not entered a dwelling-house, or a village, and plain water with his meals had become monotonous.

When he came outside the store, Bill, who had remained in charge of the horses, had vanished. With considerable promptitude and annoyance Heweitt at once made tracks for the nearest liquor establishment.

Lochinvar boasted two of these, and it was in the second, the Palace Hotel, that he ultimately located Bill.

Sounds of excitement greeted Heweitt's ears as he neared the door, which he threw open with more haste than caution. He quickly discovered that Bill was part of the excitement.

The little man was standing by the bar, a tumbler in one hand and symptoms of whisky already plentiful in his flushed face and glittering eyes. Evidently he had considered his time was brief and therefore to be made the most of. He was talking loudly and very fast, to a dozen loungers in general and no one in particular. It surely looked as though he had not returned to Heweitt all the money he had saved over his horse deal.

Heweitt scented danger. Bill was not to be trusted sober, and there was still less reason for confidence in him when drunk.

"An' what I says is this," he was declaiming oracularly as Heweitt entered. "I says that yer mounted p'lice is a parcel o' ruddy fools—like most of the slops everywhere. If I'd no more gumption that wot they 'as I'd go an' drown myself."

"An' how's that, mister?" inquired one tall raw-boned fellow in a lazy, indulgent drawl.

"Lumme; ain't I been tellin' yer. 'Ave yer all got cotton wool over yer ears? If th' p'lice wasn't fools, I says, would this 'ere Steve 'Eweitt be able to go on as 'e is? Answer me that now. I put it to yer as men o' th' world. Now would 'e? But yer p'lice are blind."

"Come out."

And Heweitt went up to him and put no easy hand on his arm. Bill twisted away, and his glaring eyes met Heweitt's viciously.

"Who in 'ell are you?" he demanded thickly, "orderin' me about. Take yer 'and away, or yer'll get this in yer face, quick," and he lifted the half emptied tumbler threateningly.

"Come out," repeated Heweitt, not pleasantly.

Bill turned so as to face the others.

"'E says 'Come out,' same as I was a dawg," he shouted. "'Eaf 'im. An' whose 'is blooming nibs, anyway? Like all the rest of yer perishin' Canadjians—thinks 'e owns the bloomin' earth. I'm fair sick o' the lot of yer. Fools, babies—that's wot yer all are. Give me England—good ole England—an' Englishmen every time!"

For the moment Heweitt hesitated. He did not believe Bill had the remotest suspicion of his real identity, but should it be that he was mistaken, to leave the partly-intoxicated little brute in the hotel was to court disaster. Vicious-minded, ungrateful, it would be easy for him to say that which would arouse the suspicions of his listeners. Heweitt had succeeded so far in covering his trail, but the risk of discovery could never be absent. In addition, he was anxious nothing should happen that might interfere with his intentions regarding the stage.

While he hesitated, a man in the crowd got in a word.

"What's the matter with Canada?" he demanded angrily.

"Wot's the matter, eh?" Bill turned on him at once. "Wot ain't the matter? Canada's an' ole, a bloomin' perishin' desert inhabited by bally chumps. Take that there"; and he pointed a shaking hand at a good-sized bill hanging on the wall.

Everyone looked, Heweitt included. It was a police notice, and it had reference to one, Steve Heweitt. It notified the offer of a reward of fifty dollars for such information as would lead to his arrest, and below was a likeness purporting to be Heweitt's. It was not a good one.

"Take that for instance," repeated Bill. "Why if yer p'lice wasn't mugs, if yer was 'alf men, yer'd

cop that blighter in less'n no time. No spunk, that's wot's the matter with you Canadian lot. Why, blimey! I'd do it myself."

"Do what?" a young fellow in overalls demanded warmly.

"Why, lay that Steve 'Eweitt by the 'eels," replied Bill derisively. "Easy as robbin' a church."

"You?" The young Canadian was more angry than amused.

"Yus, my ol' cock. Easy as this."

And the whisky glass was flung into the face of the questioner.

In an instant there was a riot. The young native made a rush and grabbed Bill, and the latter, pot valiant though overweighted, joined issue with fists and feet, screaming the most horrible language while he fought. He hadn't the chance of a snowflake in a furnace.

Heweitt made a move.

"Don't you take no hand, mister," more than one voice warned him. "The mean little skunk deserves a lammin'. He's been asking for it. Sock it into him, Jim."

Bill did deserve it, and for a moment Heweitt hesitated. But richly as the cockney deserved the lesson, for his own sake it were better for him to break up the fight and rescue his companion. There was no telling what the creature might let out in his excitement.

Before he could be prevented, he had grabbed Bill's assailant, twisted away his arms, and when the man turned the attack upon him, laid him flat on his back with a hard clip on the side of the head.

"Boys," he said, facing the room; "I'm not wanting trouble, but if there's anyone here fool enough to want to carry further what this drunken little swine has started, I'll see him all the way. He deserves a

licking; but he's with me, and he's drunk anyway, and in no condition for scrapping. And he's too blamed ignorant to apologize. But as he was in the wrong to begin with, I'll apologize for him."

It was a manly, sensible speech, and the speaker looked tough and muscular enough to be awkward for anyone's handling. The proprietor of the hotel backing him up, the belligerents grew calmer.

"And see here," said the hotel keeper, turning on Hewitt. "You take that ornary little varmint along with you an' git. A man has no call to git drunk on what he's swallered, but I'll have no fightin' in my show. Vamose."

"If you sold less villainous poison there probably wouldn't be any fighting," retorted Hewitt.

Laying hands on Bill, he dragged him, somewhat sobered by the hammering he had taken, out of the hotel, shoved him on to his pony and hit the trail quick before any further mischief happened. Bill, resentful, and vicious, kept up a running fire of injurious comment upon what he chose to designate his companion's "'igh 'andedness," but finding not the slightest attention paid to his chattering, subsided into a sulky silence.

They rode hard that evening, the trail bad, and Hewitt resolutely turning a deaf ear to the frequent demands of Bill that a halt be made. He was very sick, he declared, and suffering agony.

"'Ere, guv'nor, I can't bloomin' well go no further," he at last whined, finding demands and protests alike unheeded.

"You needn't," Hewitt told him curtly.

"But wot'll I do?"

"That's for you to find out. If you fall off, I'm not stopping to pick you up. You may as well get off here as anywhere else. We've come far enough."

Bill glanced at him evilly, and muttered something

uncomplimentary, but he pulled himself together and went on.

They camped that night in a wood close by the Ghostpine Lake. As soon as he had dropped from the saddle, Bill flung himself on the ground and resolutely refused to lift a finger towards fire or food. Ignoring him, Heweitt gathered wood and brewed coffee.

"Keep it," his companion said rudely when offered his share of the coffee-pot and cold bacon.

"As you please."

Heweitt ate and drank, lighted his pipe, and smoked with as much attention to the huddled figure on the other side of the fire as though it did not exist. This was hardly wise. Bill neither moved nor spoke, but he was wide awake, and the play of the flickering flames upon his sharpened features and smouldering eyes gave revelation of mental processes that would have given the outlaw food for thought had he been more observant. Now and again Bill grinned, though no mirth came into his eyes.

The next morning at breakfast (Bill had condescended to eat) Heweitt said abruptly, "You made a fool of yourself yesterday."

"It was the drink got into my 'ead," explained Bill.

"Just so. Well, it isn't going to happen again—so far as I am concerned," went on Heweitt, but with no appearance of anger. The next time the drink lands you in trouble, you'll get yourself out of it. A companion who drinks so that he loses control of his tongue and his hands is too dangerous for me."

"Wot-er mean by that?" asked Bill sullenly after a half minute of cogitation.

"Just exactly what I said, my friend. If you want it more plain—I'm through with you. You and I part company here and now."

For the fraction of a second the vicious little eyes looked at Heweitt over the edge of the drinking mug, the broken and discoloured teeth clamped vindictively upon the metal. Then the mug was lowered and Bill looked at the outlaw with an expression indicating comic dismay.

"Oh, I say, guv'nor!" he broke forth in jaunty protest. "Ain't yer comin' it a bit too strong, eh? Goin' to turn a bloke down just because an extra drop o' booze gets into 'is 'ead an' makes 'im a bit too frisky? Say, that ain't playin' th' game, strewth, it ain't."

"It's no good talking," Heweitt declared, shaking his head. "What I've said goes. From now, you go your way and I'll go mine."

"An' where in 'ell'll I go?" demanded Bill, with a gust of passion. "You bring me up to this Gawd-forsaken desert 'ere, an' then yer turns me adrift like a broken-legged dawg. It's cruel. Blimey! it's dam cruel."

There were tears of self-pity in his eyes, but Heweitt was adamant.

"You're no worse off here than where I found you," he argued. "You've a horse. The trail from Calgary to Edmonton is not three hours' ride away; you can't miss it. But stay along with me you don't."

Irresolution and evil, dismay and hatred, were pictured in the wastrel's working face as he listened. His body shivered in some strong emotion. He made a last appeal.

"Gimme another chance, guv'nor," he begged, but Heweitt shook his head impatiently. "Gimme another chance," screamed Bill, "or true as Gawd I'll do it."

"You're too late. And if by 'doing it' you mean cutting your throat, you'll be doing Canada and your-

self a service," rejoined Heweitt, in a hard voice. "But you won't. You haven't the nerve."

He stood up, emptying the coffee-pot on the fire. As he stamped upon and extinguished the sparks, Bill stood watching him, livid and with set face. He was no longer trembling. Then—

"Righto, guv'nor," he said quietly and turned his back.

Heweitt went forward alone. If he expected a return of Bill he was mistaken, and relieved.

Two evenings later, favoured by a poor light, and at an awkward stretch of rough and broken ground where the road between Calgary and Edmonton crossed the Indian Reserve, Heweitt brought off his coup. While the whole attention of the driver of the stage was concentrated on the business of keeping his four horses on their legs, Heweitt rode suddenly out from a drift and called upon the man with the reins to ease up for a spell, brusquely explaining the nature of his invitation.

"It's a hold-up, you fool! Sit quiet, an' you won't get hurt," one of the inside passengers violently instructed his sole companion.

The latter, directly he heard the robber's voice, uttered a terrified exclamation and attempted a hurried exit.

"Sit down. Do you want to get us all shot up?"

But the warning was futile, the terrified one was not to be restrained. Evading the other's attempted grip, he slipped from his seat and so outside. At that moment shots rang out, followed by loud shouting.

Heweitt had not expected trouble, but on the stage was a tenderfoot, the young Englishman who had bought the ranch over by the Little Red Deer, as Ed McCall had made known to Heweitt.

Filled to the cork with what he had read of the wild

and woolly West, just as full of courage, and with strong ideas on the subject of personal protection, he was all there when Heweitt hit the immediate scenery with the stage robber's popular form of address to travellers.

He pulled a gun promptly, and because of the bad light and accurate shooting on the quick draw being less a natural gift than the result of a whole lot of practice which he had not had, he missed his target.

With four men yelling to him not to be a fool, he cut loose again. He was quick certainly, and just as he was making a third shot, with the tail of his eye Heweitt saw a figure suddenly leave the side of the stage and jump high in front of him. The next instant his own gun barked, and the tenderfoot, carefully plugged through the right forearm, perforce dropped his weapon and capitulated.

"Somebody club that damned fool over the head before he does any further mischief," commanded Heweitt savagely from behind his gun. "And you, gentlemen, hand out your stuff quick; I've no time to waste."

He had seen the face of the shot man as he fell and turned over, and it was the face of Bill, though truth seemed a preposterous liar. What had prompted the action of the London wastrel he could not imagine, any more than he could comprehend the circumstances bringing him on the scene; but he believed the man dead, and he was filled with a savage fury against the slayer.

The outlaw's orders received instant obedience. Three minutes later, the contents of the hat passed down to him shoved into his pockets, without even a "good night" to the donors, Heweitt backed his pony into the boulder-strewn drift, turned, jammed in his spurs, and was riding hell-for-leather for the hiding-place he had already located.

Bill's body was lying across the saddle in front of him. At least he would give it burial. Whether by chance or design the poor wretch had saved his life.

"I copped it all right, guv'nor. I'm a goner."

Heweitt turned from the fire he was persuading into a blaze and knelt by Bill's side. The man was not dead as he had supposed, but a very few seconds' examination made it clear that he was dying. Bill was lying on his back, eyes wide open, breathing in short, quick gasps. There was a wet red patch on the left side of his shirt, spreading about the armpit, and there was blood at the corners of his white-lipped mouth.

"I say, why didn't yer say that was yer game?" he croaked as Heweitt bent over him. "If yer 'ad, I'd 'ave 'elped yer, strite, I would. I done a bit of pinchin' myself—in London."

Heweitt had no words. What was there to say? But the feeling of his own responsibility for this creature's death struck him with the force of a blow.

"Wish I'd never left the ol' crib," went on Bill, his eyes half closed.

His head was now resting on Heweitt's knee, but he spoke with difficulty. Blood, very bright of colour, was trickling down his chin, but his body was quite still as though he were feeling no pain.

"But Emma wanted it. Good old Emma! Wish I could see 'er again."

Bill's eyes closed, and for a couple of minutes during which Heweitt moistened his lips from a flask of whisky, he was silent. Then he stirred, his lids lifted slowly and he looked up at the outlaw.

"I say, 'Eweitt, wot jer ever take on wiv me at all for?" he asked curiously. "Yer'd no call to."

"You were—ill and I thought you wanted looking after," answered Heweitt, lamely enough.

He noticed, but it did not strike him as curious, that the dying man addressed him by his proper name.

"Thought I was a bloomin' kid, I s'pose," said Bill, a pale ghost of the impudence Heweitt knew and had found so exasperating flickering into the fading eyes. "Well, p'raps yer right. I was a kid. Blimey, I believe that was Emma's idea. Thought I'd no stuffin' in me, she did."

"But she was wrong."

Bill tried to grin.

Minutes passed; the dying man's breathing grew quicker, more shallow and stertorous. Heweitt's words had been genuine. He truly believed it was honest intention to save him, and not the blind passion of attack had brought Bill in front of him when the impulsive Englishman had fired his third shot.

"Knew it was yer, 'Eweitt, from the first—from that bit o' paper that fell out of yer pocket that night," Bill went on monotonously. "But I didn't tell that p'liceman bloke I met, did I?" He tried to laugh. "Nor them chumps we met in the 'otel."

"No, no. Don't, Bill, don't talk, it makes you worse."

"Worse!" The outcast made an attempt at derisive laughter, a ghastly cackling that caused the listener to shiver and was followed by a hard rattling sound. "I ain't no worse than I ever will be, guv'nor, so wot's it matter? Say."

"Yes, my boy." Heweitt bent his head until his ear was almost against Bill's lips.

"Do yer know wot I was on that coach for?"

"No, Bill."

"Sold—my 'orse—pay—the fare—to Edmonton. Reckoned yer'd—treated me dam bad—'Eweitt, tellin' me sling—my 'ook. Thought—I'd put it acrost yer—bloomin' p'lice—Edmonton."

"What! You were going to Edmonton, to inform the police you knew where I was?" cried Heweitt.

Bill nodded feebly. "Glad I didn't though." There was a long pause. Then, "Gimme drink."

The spirit trickled between his lips, giving him temporary strength. He half sat up, grabbing at the whisky flask with shaky fingers and Heweitt did not restrain him. Getting the mouth to his lips, he tried to pour the contents down his throat. The fiery spirit choked him, and with the resultant coughing blood jetted from his lips. Spent, he dropped back against Heweitt's knee.

"Good ol' 'Eweitt," he gasped. "Pull through, ol' sport. Emma!"

As he called the name he shivered violently, his head fell forward and his eyes closed.

Bill was dead.

CHAPTER IX

THE RANCH ON THE CLEARWATER

THE men of the North-West Mounted Police (the " R " in front is a recent institution) belong to the finest body of its kind in the whole world, and there are few earthly matters they will hesitate to take in hand, and mostly their efforts have a successful conclusion. But they cannot be in two places at once.

This was the fact overlooked by those persons who grumbled because Steve Heweitt was not laid promptly by the heels.

" What! that fellow not caught by the police yet!" complained quite a number of otherwise sensible folk when the news got about of the successful holding up of the Edmonton stage.

The men of the M.P. did not worry unduly because the question was asked, but more than one worthy individual holding office, who had never in his life ridden on patrol, set to work to worry them. So the dissatisfaction travelled downwards, until in the barracks of big centres, such as Macleod, and one-room posts, like Big Bend, men began to curse Steve Heweitt with precision and emphasis, and put in time devising plans to outwit and run to earth that disturber of the peace. The offering of a useful-sized reward stimulated their imaginations as well as

arousing a keener personal interest in the general community.

The result, for the police, was still longer and further riding; more extensive questioning and searching; more discomfort and neglected meals due to the optimism of hopeful individuals who believed they had seen the outlaw in the flesh, but invariably proved to have been mistaken; more and still heartier cursing. But for all the hard work there was nothing to show. For the time being Steve Hewitt was dead off the map.

In spite of their troubles, the police refused to be depressed, according to custom and habit.

"Don't you worry," they'd say cheerfully when publicly questioned. "We'll rope Hewitt in one day, sure."

And they said that because they honestly believed it.

Amongst them was constable Patrick Glyn, who represented authority in a forgotten district where the mountains loomed big and tall about him. He was a quiet man, of more than average intelligence in a force whereof the standard of intelligence is high, and with the heart of a lion. To him came official notification concerning Steve Hewitt, and it amused Glyn to work out little plans of campaign which he would act upon were he himself the outlaw being watched for and hunted. He had some kind of a theory that by putting oneself in the criminal's place, attempting to adopt his mentality and point of view, the policeman starts with a better hope of success than if he depend upon mere rule of thumb and exiguous methods. He cherished the notion that, specially set to trail down Hewitt, he would earn no disappointment.

Along in the summer, a while after the stage hold-up, a constable rode up one afternoon to Glyn's cabin, found him at home, and delivered an official

communication. He was instructed to take Glyn's place.

"And you'll be taking a stroll down to Macleod, Pat, or Regina, or I'm a liar," the constable concluded, handing over the letter. "No; I haven't been looking inside it. And does she snow up here very fierce when winter comes along?"

Pat Glyn assured his substitute that he would see all the snow he wanted if he remained near Banff over the winter; he then read the letter.

"Macleod it is," he announced.

"I knew it," said the other, already making himself at home by appropriating the only seat in the shack. "That means promotion. They'll have heard of you an' that Stenning murder case."

The next day Glyn started to ride down to Macleod, hopeful—promotion was not worrying him—that the chance had come to him of putting his psychological theories into practice at the expense of Steve Hewitt.

Arrived at Macleod, he reported at the police barracks. The superintendent's second sentence disappointed him.

"Corporal Glyn," he said; "there's a job here after your own heart—one of the cunningest cow rustlers we've yet been up against. You're wanted to collect evidence against, prove at fault, and arrest. You know the Clearwater?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you'll find your man there. I needn't give you more details; you'll find those yourself. Take your own time; do the job in your own way, but bring the man in. You'll not proceed to extremes if in any way avoidable. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

And Glyn went out, softly cursing the superintendent, the cattle rustler, his promotion, and most other

things under the high heaven because, as is a man's way, he hadn't got the one thing he wanted.

By cautious stages Heweitt had made west after the stage episode, and while lazing in his lone camp one early morning when the cool, pearly mists had not yet left the hollows among the low hills, he saw the front of a horseman suddenly emerge from one of the pools of thinning vapour and throw his rope.

The next instant a lively calf was at the other end of the rope and tumbled on its side. Dismounting, the rider quickly had the little brute tied up in workmanlike fashion; he then walked away and began hunting chips for a fire. Heweitt was so interested that, forgetting all caution, he got up and walked across.

The puncher heard him, jumped round, eyed him closely and remained stock still, saying nothing.

"Hullo!" said the outlaw, amicably.

"Hello!" returned the puncher, none too amicably.

"Caught a sleeper?"

"That's it."

Sleepers are calves found wandering on the ranges and bearing an earmark, but not a brand.

Heweitt watched the puncher—a dark, lean-faced fellow in dull green chaps, and evidently not feeling the need of loosening his tongue—heat his iron; he heard the hissing of the hide as the hot stamp was firmly pressed into the flank of the heaving calf—the prolonged bellow of pain that ensued; into his nostrils rose the smell of the burned skin, and a mighty longing came to him.

It was the nearest to regretting the change in himself he had as yet reached. His thoughts began to race.

"Well, and why not?" he was asking himself.

"Out here, at the Back of Beyond——"

"Say, where's the ranch you belong?" he said aloud.

The taciturn puncher jerked a gauntleted hand in the direction of a pine-crowned bluff a couple of miles distant.

"Any chance of a job?" pursued Heweitt eagerly.

"Can't say."

"Well," he went on, refusing to be discouraged.

"I'll go and find out."

Ignoring him completely, the puncher put up his iron, released the calf, mounted his cayuse and rode off without more words. Five minutes later Heweitt climbed into the saddle and moved in the direction of the knot of dark pines showing starkly against the clear sky.

Inside six miles Heweitt located the ranch-house. It was a small erection, with a couple of sheds near by and a corral of no great extent. Outside the smaller of the sheds a man was engaged in tallowing a hide lariat. He was taking no interest in visitors, not even turning his head when Heweitt drew rein.

"Boss around?" queried the outlaw easily.

"He is."

"Glad if you'll tell me where to find him."

"Needn't look far. What d'ye want?"

The man spoke curtly, grey eyes on Heweitt's face, but without a suggestion of expression in them. He was standing with both hands loose in front of him, still grasping the rope. Yet for all the blankness of his eyes it seemed to Heweitt there was a certain expectancy about him.

"You mean you're the boss?" asked Heweitt crisply.

Something of the quick enthusiasm he had felt was already fading, the alert suspicion of the outlaw manifesting itself. Maybe this man, whom he had never seen before, recognized him as Steve Heweitt,

and was awaiting the moment for aggressive action.

"Yes, I'm the boss. What d'ye want?"

"Got a job for me?"

The man's pale, expressionless eyes slowly travelled over his visitor from Stetson to spurs. Perhaps he was satisfied as to outward appearances. He put a number of questions, but these only remotely connected with the applicant's qualifications for the job he was seeking. Coolly and without hesitation, although relying upon imagination rather than memory for his statements, Heweitt intimated where he had been last working, whence he had come recently, and the like.

"Sling your bunk in that shed," the boss said finally, indicating the smaller of the two. "As yer bringin' no other ponies than that cayuse, it'll be twenty dollars the month only."

"That'll suit me," Heweitt answered.

So for a spell the "bad man" forsook his wicked ways, and became again a tame cowpuncher, working hard and honestly, earning by the sweat of his brow every dollar promised him, as more than one outlaw has done.

It was a wholesome change, and Steve Heweitt appreciated it. He was the better for it, although the outlaw's trick of constant watchfulness never weakened, and the habit remained of sitting with his back protected and face to the window when indoors. That he proved himself by no means communicative as regards himself occasioned his companions neither worry nor suspicion.

They talked but little themselves, even of nights before turning into their bunks, the hour when the cow fraternity is apt to become almost loquacious, also exaggerative, especially when recounting experiences.

Besides Heweitt, the outfit consisted of five men

only, not including the boss, whose name was Rogers. One was a half-breed, with plain evidence of his Cree blood showing in his swarthy complexion, high cheekbones, black hair and hard eyes; on the range he had no superior. Jake Evans and Frank Willis were punchers from across the international boundary. O'Brien was a good-looking fellow, preternaturally solemn, diffident where horses were concerned and with nothing traditionally Hibernian about his make-up except his name. He was a recent arrival, Heweitt learned. The fifth was Jim Lemoine, a Canadian—the fellow whom Heweitt had watched putting a brand on the “sleeper.”

To tell the truth, it was not a gay crowd, although that mattered nothing to Heweitt. He was asked no questions about himself and put none in return. But he was cattleman enough to notice, before many weeks had passed and he had learned the extent of the ranch, which was not large, that there were certain points about it requiring elucidation.

To Lemoine he said one afternoon——

“Providence has been mighty good to our boss seemingly.”

“How’s that?” inquired the gloomy Canadian.

“Law of natural increase seems to be working overtime in his favour.”

“Hey?”

“Well, the number of yearlings is nearly equal to that of the cows.”

Now the average proportion of calves to cows on the ordinary ranch is about one to two.

Lemoine looked at Steve with a blank face. More than once had the outlaw fancied he had seen the man watching him with a queer expression, as of uncertainty, but if Lemoine had any suspicions of the new puncher he gave no intimation of it.

“Hadn’t noticed anything wrong,” he said quietly.

But Heweitt was certain there was something wrong, feeling by no means satisfied that every cow on the range had been blessed with offspring. Such surplus as there was must have come from somewhere, and as calves do not fall down from heaven or evolve from mist, that somewhere might very well be the neighbouring ranches.

Still, Heweitt could not claim it as any business of his if his boss thought fit to increase his own herd by quietly branding with his mark any "sleepers" made by the indolent outfits of adjoining ranches. A cowpuncher's business is to look after his employer's interests, not to show sympathy with the losses of another man due to carelessness and neglect. By the law of the range any unbranded beast may be given the mark of the first man happening upon it.

None the less, as an abstract speculation the matter interested Heweitt. He mentioned it to O'Brien one day, and found the Irishman inclined to be sympathetic.

"Same here," said O'Brien. "Knocked me hell-west and crooked all ways when I come to reckon up them calves. But I guess it ain't no business of ours, partner, is it?" and he smiled.

"Doesn't matter a whoop in Hades to me," admitted Heweitt. "I'm saying nothing."

"Nor me."

Heweitt found himself rather liking the Irishman. They got along together very well, although more than once the suspicion did come to the outlaw that O'Brien was not overburdened with gumption. But the liking grew, and it was stimulated by an incident occurring during Heweitt's third week at the ranch.

He and O'Brien were sent down to Diamond City, a growing settlement back in the foothills with three saloons, one store, and nine assorted dwelling-houses.

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Their business was to bring up a thoroughbred bull Rogers had imported. So the boss said anyway, although the bull was afterwards claimed by another man, who alleged that he had done the importing.

On arrival, Heweitt and O'Brien made for one of the saloons. Presently a cowpuncher, riding erratically and noisily along the one street, pulled up his pony suddenly. The fellow was part of an outfit that had got its time, and had come into Diamond City to make due celebration. The painkiller had been prevalent, and after steadily experimenting with it for two hours, this particular item of the gang was three parts drunk, and a whole lot different from the quiet and really useful person he was upon the range.

"I'm a Montana cyclone an' bad at that," he howled, his eyes on Heweitt. "I'm a wolf. Ee-e-ow-ow!"

He was swinging a six-gun most carelessly and, making a remark to the effect that he found Heweitt's face worrying to his eyesight, he abruptly straightened his arm and let fly.

Heweitt felt the bullet skin his cheek ere it buried itself in the doorpost, and instead of turning the other to the shooter, he pulled his own gun. Not having any inclinations towards suicide, he let drive, and the drunken puncher's cayuse keeled over with a bullet through its chest.

After which Heweitt prudently retired within the saloon.

Not only was the cowpuncher's pony killed, but his own feelings were badly hurt. He said so, also a few other things which Heweitt heard perfectly. Arising from the dust, the aggrieved one sought his friends, and together they hurried to the entertainment in the saloon. For some minutes there was considerable roughhouse. Several things were broken. There was no further shooting, but bottles, full and

empty, chairs, stirrup straps and hard fists helped to make up for the omission.

With five to one against him Heweitt was kept mighty busy. The saloon took on a highly demoralized appearance. If the cowboys thought they had a cinch that opinion was early corrected, and Heweitt put up a satisfactory fight until a stirrup iron cut him over the head and he went dizzy.

It was then that O'Brien appeared on the scene; and for a quiet man and one inclined to be slow upon normal occasions, he proved himself a useful ally in a scrap and a beautifully hard hitter. Thanks to his interference Heweitt was given time to pull round. After which, as the admiring bar-keeper, who was an interested spectator with the top of his head just appearing over the further edge of the counter, put it, "the cowboys didn't know whether they was in hell or springtime."

"Guess I owe you something, Irish," Heweitt said gratefully as they hit the trail back for the ranch.

His impression was that O'Brien had saved his life.

"Oh that's all right, partner," O'Brien said easily.

He was a big, untidy fellow, always ready with a smile, and a most willing worker. His further conversation on the way back was chiefly concerned with gardening.

"Glad to have met up with you; I like a man," Heweitt confided to him when, having turned their horses into the corral and pitched them a bundle of hay, they disposed of the bull in a smaller enclosure. "Real men are plumb scarce."

Whereat O'Brien actually blushed, looking as confused as a girl at her first dance, when her first partner offers his arm.

"Oh! that's all right," he rejoined nervously.

Apparently his was a limited vocabulary.

He was even quieter than usual that evening when, sitting in the bunk house, smoking numerous cigarettes, Heweitt tried to draw him into conversation. He did not even brighten up when the boss, noticing Heweitt's bandaged head, received a casual account of the scrap in Diamond City.

Rogers looked at O'Brien, who became more uncomfortable under Heweitt's enthusiastic references to the timely use and high-grade quality of his fighting abilities. The boss appeared amused.

"Some folks is sure surprising," he drawled half contemptuously. "I hadn't figured on Irish bein' no scrap buster. Didn't think when he come here more'n a month back that he was good for anything 'cept light work. Say, Irish, reckon yer good to ride horse? Real horse, I mean, not a mean cuss that's had all th' spunk quirted out of him."

"Might if it wasn't three parts dead," put in Frank Willis.

"Or Irish three parts drunk," added Evans.

Heweitt glanced at O'Brien, who was visibly disconcerted, reddening under the banter.

"Guess I can stick on a pony all right," he ventured.

"Can, hey? Boys, we'll see some fun to-morrow," grinned the boss.

There the stringing ceased; but the trial duly came off the next day, and O'Brien was bucked five times from the back of the unbroken plug provided, before he said he reckoned he'd had sufficient.

With the rest Steve Heweitt had watched the performance, and the others gone, he strolled after the discomfited horseman.

"Guess you'd have stayed on all right if you'd tried hard enough," he said.

But O'Brien was not to be drawn. "Think so?" he said, indifferently; and walked away.

CHAPTER X

THE RUSTLERS

THE days slipped by, each bringing with it a full round of body tiring work that gave a man no excuse for not sleeping at nights, and Steve Heweitt was very content. It was work he knew and liked, and he had slipped back into it with the ease with which a man slips on an old coat. The days became weeks, and he was losing the apprehension that continuity of the life would be broken. His companions were not, maybe, such as he would have made free choice of, but he found little real objection to any one of them.

That none suspected him for what he was he felt comfortably certain. There had been no sign of the appearance of a police patrol in the locality. He was beginning to ask himself whether it would not be the better wisdom to stay over on the ranch for the winter. In six months' time the police activity he had occasioned would have simmered down, giving him a better chance of making his intended get-away from the country.

Of Hope Marley he thought often; and at times there came to him a mad longing to see her, to slip off one morning and brave the risks of the two hundred mile ride to the Sheep River that he might have the pleasure of looking again into the moist depths of those hazel grey eyes, of listening to the low, clear

tones of the sweet voice that had been so urgent on his behalf in its pleading.

It was a novel, a fierce temptation that Heweitt found difficulty in overcoming.

One morning, a fortnight after O'Brien's inglorious riding trial, Rogers gave instructions to Heweitt, withdrawing him from that side of the range where he usually rode.

"You can come along too, Irish," he added. "Ought by rights to have four men, but I can't spare one of the others, so we'll have to do the best we can."

As the boss himself and Lemoine, the Canadian, meant accompanying Heweitt, the inclusion of O'Brien was hardly any kind of compliment.

They started in the direction of a low, and scarcely perceptible rise to the westward of the range which, as they drew nearer, resolved itself into a series of high bluffs, circularly disposed and enclosing a level-floored, elevated pasture some five hundred acres in extent. The outside flanks of the bluffs were of an inclination to be ridden with ease, but the inner walls were steep enough to make ascent by foot and hand climbing a necessity.

The only means of access to the pasture was by a narrow gap formed by the dropping away of the enclosing bluffs which converted it into a perfectly natural corral. Across this gap a stout wooden fence had been thrown, making as snug and secure an enclosure as a pound. The slip bars in the fence opening in position, no animals enclosed within had the slightest opportunity of escape.

Yet one might have ridden within a quarter mile of the spot without becoming aware of the existence of the valley.

Heweitt's earlier suspicions as to the honesty of his employer recurred to him with renewed vigour as

he passed through the gap and saw the richness of the grass on which a small bunch of horses were feeding. His practised eye took them in at a glance. These were no thirty dollar cayuses, but animals of blood and high breeding. The sight was thought-inspiring. Off hand one would have said that Rogers was a man to make ranching a sure-thing proposition.

Lemoine and O'Brien were left outside, the slip rails lowered, and the boss and Heweitt entered the pasture. Their business was to bunch the horses gently and head them for the gap. The horses were wild and suspicious after their nature, and an hour of hard riding passed before they were rounded up and started on the dead run for the break in the fence.

So far as might be seen, all carried the brand of the ranch, J with a bar above—not improbably made with a hot iron through a wet blanket, thought Heweitt.

“Look lively there!” roared Rogers as he pounded at the heels of the flying animals. Don’t let ’em scatter, an’ start ’em milling if they look like getting on the run.”

Lemoine, who knew his business without any telling, was already on the move, but O'Brien seemed slow.

The horses were scared. Left to themselves, they would have got on the run as though meaning to fetch up no nearer than just this side of Eternity, but they were under the handling of men who knew animals and their idiosyncrasies. To the ignorant onlooker the scene presented was one bordering upon hopeless confusion; but to the knowing eye it was a fine sight to watch these trained riders thwarting, checking, overpowering the untamed will of the wild creatures without violence or undue haste.

At length the drove, abandoning the intention with which it had emerged from its prison, settled down to do as its masters required. In a strung-out line the

animals started across the plain, flanks and rear vigilantly guarded. They moved slowly, until the nervousness of the splendid animals had died away, and enjoyment of the unexpected freedom no longer showed itself in attempted mad gallopings to left and right of the landscape.

"Make a line for the ranch," had been the order of the boss.

And for a mile or more the drove proceeded. Then in obedience to a shout, Lemoine dropped slightly back and Rogers joined him. For a few moments the pair remained in consultation.

"Ma-ac!"

The long drawn out yell (it was by the name of Mackenzie that Heweitt had elected to be known) reached the ears of Heweitt, riding in advance of the drove, and he turned in his saddle. Rogers was signalling to him, and he noticed that Lemoine was riding away. The boss had decided that he and the two others could take the bunch back to the ranch while the Canadian departed on a further task. As he wheeled to ride back, Heweitt saw that which at once held his attention. To surprise him was not easy, but this time he got it full.

O'Brien had left his post on the right flank, and in spite of furious signalling on the part of Rogers, was riding direct towards the boss. Moreover, he was sitting his pony like a man who has spent his life in the plainsman's saddle. The loose precariousness of his customary seat had wholly vanished. He reached Rogers and pulled up with a jerk. Apparently he said something disagreeable; for the following instant Heweitt saw a gun in the boss's hand, and a puff of smoke was issuing from the muzzle.

With the echo of the pistol shot in his ears, Heweitt, absolutely mystified and careless of the horses, got on the dead run back. What was hap-

pening he had not a notion, but it was plainly serious. His first idea was that O'Brien had suddenly gone mad. But Heweitt was not so flustered by this amazing turn of events that he failed to note that Lemoine, too, had heard the shot and was returning as fast as his pony could lay hoofs to ground. As he rode, Heweitt felt for his own weapon. Mad or sane, O'Brien was not going to be shot down if he could prevent it.

"You're what?"

It was Rogers' question Heweitt heard as he rode up, and the expression of the boss's face was worth seeing. Amazement, anger, incredulity—all had a show. He was staring at O'Brien, who also was armed, although his possession of any weapon more deadly than a clasp knife had never been suspected.

And a change indeed it was that had come upon Irish. The quiet, dull expression of vacant good humour had vanished from his eyes, which were hard, alert, full of purpose. His jaw was set aggressively, and there was a most unmistakable fighting look in his face. About him was an air of authority bewildering in its novelty.

He seemed to fill a bigger space in the landscape than heretofore.

"That's right," came his prompt, crisp answer to the boss. "I'm Corporal Glyn, of the Mounted Police, an' you're my prisoner. I've waited a long time, but I reckon you're caught all right now; and you're going along with me, if you ain't more of a fool than I take you to be."

He lifted his revolver while he spoke and had Rogers covered; and he looked good to shoot. Maybe Rogers thought the same, although shooting is a threat to be made good by the N.W.M. policeman only in the direst extremity. The boss's jaw dropped

lower as the surprising information penetrated deeper into his intelligence. His ready impulse towards murder weakened under the corporal's direct gaze and unwavering weapon.

But there was another factor in the case which Glyn had apparently forgotten. It was right there, however, plumb ready for action, and not meaning to be overlooked. Lemoine was Rogers' right-hand man, and as deeply implicated in the rustling business of which Rogers had been long suspected by the authorities. Moreover, he was not the kind of man who goes under without making a fight.

"Don't shoot!"

The curt command cut sharply across the dead silence following upon Glyn's dramatic announcement. Lemoine, his gun lifted for a quick shot at the corporal, heard it and hesitated for the fraction of a second. His eyes switched off from Irish, the butt of the ranch now master of a highly dramatic situation, to meet those of Steve Heweitt. A savage expression leaped into his swarthy face as he realized the outlaw's intention. Finger on trigger, Heweitt looked one worthy of respect.

"This ain't no play of yours," snarled the Canadian. "You ain't no damned policeman."

Heweitt was not; in fact his sympathies with the Mounted Police as a corporate body were mighty small, but he had quickly made up his mind as to his part in the drama so suddenly produced. On the frontier a man learns to think rapidly and act on the heels of his decision, and Steve Heweitt had had a double education.

For Rogers he did not care a cent. Neither was he caring a handful of beans whether the government did or did not apprehend the cattle thief. But Corporal Glyn, the Mounted Policeman, and O'Brien, his fellow worker on the ranch, were two very separate

entities in his sight. He saw very clearly that the man who had saved him from being killed but a few days before now stood in danger of losing his own life. So Steve Heweitt made his choice.

"I know I'm not a policeman," he answered Lemoine coolly.

"Then what in hell you buttin' in for?" demanded the angry Canadian.

"Because I choose," Heweitt replied crisply. "Put that gun up, my friend, and there's less chance of your getting hurt. Corporal"—he did not turn his head—"you have a warrant?"

"Had it this two months. I'll show it to this fellow here if he's feeling doubtful."

"Include Lemoine?"

"No."

"Then you, my friend, will do well to clear out while you can," Heweitt addressed Lemoine. "You can't help Rogers any, but if you're anxious for a gun fight, you'll lose your life."

Suddenly the Canadian accepted the situation, gave up his revolver as directed, and rode away. When Rogers began to open his mouth—and Lemoine knew his man—it would profit him to be a whole lot absent.

"And now we'll be going," announced Glyn. "We'll make the trail to Forty Mile, and it's only five hours from there to the Red Deer post, and that's where we're going." He turned to Heweitt, and there was a certain odd hesitation in his manner. "You'll come with me so far?" he asked.

"Why, sure," answered Heweitt readily.

Red Deer was in the Calgary administrative district, and he was well aware of the risk he was taking by thus venturing so close to the den of the lion; but he could not leave Glyn on his own to manage the drove of recovered stolen horses, and at the same time

keep a safe hand on Rogers, tame as the rustler had become.

"Now that's more than good of you," returned the corporal, with a smile that had something almost of wistful regret in it.

With the forced assistance of Rogers, the horses, which had scattered and were grazing quietly, were rounded up and got on the move again.

During that odd ride to the police post, with Rogers riding sullenly upon the right flank of the string and never given a chance of slipping away, the corporal took advantage of a brief halt to bring his pony alongside Hewitt's.

"Say, do you reckon this recent business makes us nearly quits?" he asked earnestly.

"You're referring to the debt I owe you?" rejoined the outlaw, looking into the policeman's troubled eyes with a friendly smile. "Well, yes, I reckon we're about square now. Why?"

But Glyn did not explain.

"I'm mighty glad you think so," was all he said; and he drew a long breath as though a weight had been lifted off his mind.

Arrived at the Red Deer police post, Hewitt assisted in turning the drove into a rough corral. He was well satisfied that the one constable on duty was more interested in the captured rustler than himself.

"Well, so long," said Hewitt, the business completed, refusing the invitation to go inside. "No, I won't eat, thank you. I'll be getting back to the ranch. I reckon I won't be wanted there any longer, but I may as well get hold of my belongings."

"Sure," agreed the corporal. He added unexpectedly, "I'll go back along with you. I've left some truck there I may as well have."

Hewitt could not well refuse, though he would

willingly have dispensed with the policeman's company.

Upon arrival at the ranch, they found it deserted by all but the Chinese cook, who was plainly scared. He told them that Lemoine and the rest of the outfit had collected the remainder of the stock and driven it off with them during the afternoon.

It being too late to make the return journey to Red Deer, Hewitt and Glyn slept at the ranch the night.

The next morning, at breakfast, which they cooked themselves, the Chink having decamped during the night, Glyn vouchsafed some particulars of the scheme by which he had so successfully completed the case against Rogers, who had for long been suspected of complicity in the robberies against the ranchers of the neighbourhood. Hewitt congratulated him.

"Say, Mac," said Glyn abruptly: "if you'd known I was a policeman, would you have come to my help as you did?"

He laid down knife and fork, and with elbows on the table, looked squarely at his companion.

"Why not?" returned Hewitt evasively, but smiling at the recollection of the situation which had converted him into an ally and defender of one of his avowed enemies. "Why I guess I should."

"Ah!" And Glyn covered the better part of his face with his coffee mug.

During the rest of the meal he spoke no more. An unaccountable depression seemed to have fallen over him.

He dropped into a brown study, from which he was roused by Hewitt telling him he reckoned he'd be going to find his pony.

"You'll be going too, eh? Nothing else to stop for, and I'll not be going back your way," the outlaw said. "May as well say 'So long' now."

Corporal Glyn brought his elbows off the table and slowly lifted his loose bulk upright.

"Guess you will be riding back along with me," he said in a low but perfectly steady voice.

Heweitt glanced quickly, held his eyes, and stopped dead in his tracks. There was a half-minute of silence.

"You're making a mistake," he said evenly. "I ride by myself."

Glyn, weight leaning forward, both hands displayed on the breakfast table, shook his head slightly. But there was a meaning in his face, and the outlaw's right hand shot to his hip.

"No use."

Glyn again shook his head. He seemed thoroughly unhappy.

"The Chink drew the cartridges last night while you were asleep," he said. "I told him to before I sent him away."

And at that Steve Heweitt understood. With a sudden harsh laugh he sat down in the seat just vacated. It did not occur to him that the policeman could possibly be bluffing.

CHAPTER XI

A MATTER OF DUTY

"**Y**OU know?"
Glyn nodded.
"When?"

The outlaw could recollect no single circumstance, no indiscretion on his part, giving rise to suspicion of his identity. True, the police notices contained a picture of himself, but he was sceptical of this as an aid to identification, and he had felt satisfied that a beard unattended to for many weeks had obliterated all resemblance to the clean-shaved face of the printed portrait.

"Recognized you in the saloon in Diamond," replied Glyn.

Nothing about him betrayed triumph in his capture. On the contrary, his eyes were gloomy, his voice dispirited. Corporal Patrick Glyn was feeling the reverse of pleased with himself.

"And you've kept it to yourself all this time? Well, corporal, you're surely a surprising man. You proved yourself a smart man by the way in which you deceived Rogers and the rest of us here, but it's clear you're even smarter than that. But say."

"Yes?"

"If you recognized me in Diamond, why in thunder did you come to my assistance? Why not have made the arrest then and there?"

The corporal allowed the first question to pass. "You're forgetting what was my business at the ranch," he answered.

"And you allowed I could keep, eh?" pursued Heweitt curiously. "How did you know but that I might take fright and hike out any day?"

"I didn't. It was Rogers, anyway, I had come after."

"And you've landed me as well! Looks as if you were getting more than your full share of good luck, Corporal Glyn."

"Luck!" Glyn smiled faintly.

"Well, maybe that's not the right word. Luck's something not wholly deserved as a rule, and you do deserve what has come to you."

But for all his light talk and apparent philosophic acceptance of the situation, Heweitt was cursing himself for a reckless, quixotic fool. It wasn't bad luck from which he was suffering, merely the consequences of his own condemned stupidity. He thoroughly deserved what had befallen. That Glyn had fooled him properly was no excuse at all.

But had Hope Marley deserved this of him?

"Heweitt."

The outlaw came out from his angry abstraction to find his captor regarding him fixedly.

"Heweitt; it's God's own truth that I'm telling you, though maybe you'll not believe it. I'm damn sorry this has happened."

It might be difficult to believe, but if ever sincerity looked out from a man's eyes or was revealed in his voice, it was then with Patrick Glyn.

"You see," he went on after a brief, expectant pause; "I can't be doing anything else, though it's no pleasant job for a man to do. Nor an easy one either. I wish to heaven it had fallen to another man. It was you saved my life up at Circle Bluffs less than

twenty-four hours back, and I'm not forgetting it."

Heweitt broke in impatiently. "That's nothing to do with it."

"Maybe; but it makes a hard matter something harder for me," the corporal said heavily. "I can't forget that but for you Lemoine would have blown my head off my shoulders."

"Quits. You saved my life in Diamond. I'd have cashed in that afternoon if you'd been missing. Say, Irish (the name slipped out so easily), was it before or after that that you knew?"

"Before the fight."

Glyn sighed heavily, filled and lighted his pipe, and pushed the tobacco across to Heweitt.

"Duty's a queer business and sure uncomfortable at times," he observed.

"But you're going to do yours," said Heweitt, catching him fairly in the eyes.

"Would you expect me to do otherwise? Say, Heweitt, you're a man I like, and I don't mind telling you," said Glyn earnestly. "I've figured considerably on your case. I've followed what you've done. I hoped I'd be put on specially to the trailing of you. I made plans for the tracking of you down and capturing you. I was disappointed when I was sent up here after the rustlers, for I reckoned I'd lost my chance of ever getting you. And now it's turned out this way. You save my life. You and me got on well together here. I liked you before I knew who you were, I liked you after. And now I've done what I thought I wanted to do. I'm a man who's blamed sorry."

"But you're a policeman, whose duty it is to arrest me," Heweitt said. "And you won't be the kind of man I take you for if you fail in your duty. Why, you old son-of-a-gun, cheer up. I'm not blaming you. It's myself I'm finding fault with."

Glyn got up heavily. "We'll be getting on the move now," he said. "And I'd as lief be riding with you to Purgatory as into Calgary."

There was little or no talk between captor and prisoner as they took the south-east trail from the deserted ranch. Obvious as was the corporal's dejection, it did not affect his vigilance, and it was evident he had no intention of giving an opportunity for his companion to escape, although he had refrained from securing him against such a possible contingency. But he had no conversation.

Heweitt, too, was better satisfied to be silent, though his thoughts were busy enough. And the chief figure in them was a brown-haired girl, with hazel-grey, earnest eyes, who, flatly defiant of the law, had had no hesitation in most unequivocally proclaiming her sympathies and acting up to them. But, then, women are different from men; and Heweitt felt no call to hate his companion, who did not allow his personal feelings to interfere with his sense of duty.

Had he been in Glyn's place, Heweitt had no doubts that he would have acted exactly as the policeman.

The night was passed at Red Deer post, and if Heweitt had owned any notion of being able to slip away unnoticed, he was undeceived. If Corporal Glyn's precautions were unobtrusive they were also complete. The constable attached to the post was absent, being engaged in the forwarding to headquarters of Rogers.

After supper, which Heweitt assisted in preparing, both men found their tongues again, and conversation once started, talk went to and fro until the final pipe before turning in between the blankets. It drifted from life in England, as to which Glyn, who had never set foot outside his native Canada, evinced great curiosity, to the Riel rebellion of '85, when the corporal had lost a finger in the fighting at Duck Lake,

Any reference to Heweitt's experiences since his challenge to the law was strictly eschewed. A traveller casually entering the room would have heard or noticed nothing suggesting the actual relationship between the two men.

At length Glyn yawned, stretched himself, and rose from his seat.

"Time to turn in, I reck'on," he said.

"When you're ready," politely agreed the outlaw.

Smiling faintly, he indicated a couple of pairs of steel handcuffs which the post constable was using as ornaments upon the rough timber walls of the room.

The corporal frowned and shook his head.

"Reckon not, Heweitt," he said slowly. "I'm a middling light sleeper, and you couldn't open the door without rousing me; and I take it you're not the sort of man to attempt clubbing me while I'm asleep."

"Thank you," rejoined Heweitt with gentle irony.

Within sixty seconds of lying down he was fast asleep, and he did not awaken until the sound of an axe upon wood aroused him.

Once more on the trail, about midday, Steve Heweitt was not so preoccupied with his thoughts that he missed a gathering bank of dark cloud rolling up over the south-western end of the valley, from which they had emerged upon a bare and seemingly limitless stretch of open prairie land. Blue-black in colour, low over the earth, the dense mass came rolling across the clear blue sky with the ease and swiftness, the same suggestion of irresistible might, of the long green rollers sweeping across the face of the Atlantic, obliterating the blue and casting a sombre, almost palpable, shadow upon the face of the country.

Heweitt read the signs aright. It was an Alberta hailstorm coming up—and an Alberta hailstorm is a sure eye-opener to the ignorant.

"We're in for it," he called to his companion.

The corporal nodded.

"And there's no cover for more than ten miles," he replied. "Reckon we'll have to ride like Hades to reach Pine Creek before she bursts."

The storm was travelling with incredible swiftness; and the men, who had been riding easy, hit up the ponies to their best gait, although, seeming to sense the coming disturbance, the animals needed little urging. Above the thudding of hoofs the riders could hear the roar and rattle of the falling hail behind them long before the charged clouds had overtaken them.

"You'll go on?" Heweitt shouted—shouting was a necessity—as they neared the ford across the creek.

"It's a chance; but we'll risk her."

The sun was ashine over the creek as they caught their first glimpse of it; before the horses had reached and slid down the steep bank the sun was no more. And upon them the hail was falling in a cataract. Pebbles of congealed ice smote down, stinging the bare flesh like the thong of a whip, and falling with the force of a blow from a club. So fast and thick did they fall as to form a veritable curtain, part solid, part liquid, of a ghastly and livid hue, more chilling than snow. There was even difficulty in breathing.

Scared by the infernal racket, irritated by the stinging blows, confused by the thick moving veil from which there was no escape, the ponies snorted with terror and plunged violently from the water they could not see. But it was no time for half measures, and with spurs and quirt the terrified creatures were driven forward, rearing and kicking.

Head bent so that his face was touching his pony's mane, half blinded, Heweitt spurred and lashed. He could see nothing. Whether his companion were alongside he had no means of telling. The thunder-

ing roar and sharp rattle of the hail not only deafened but confused him.

Away to the left, Corporal Glyn suddenly shouted, a full-lunged cry, but it reached the outlaw's ears as no more than the merest whisper. Heweitt partly lifted his head to sense rather than actually to see a passing shadow, a falling something that showed for a moment like a dull blur against the pallid blanket of enveloping ice.

He did not think; there was no time even for thought, but instinct commanded him. Bending sideways from his saddle he shot out his arm, grabbing at the shadow that was already slipping beyond him. What it was he caught he had no notion, but it was something solid. As his fingers touched, the thought flashed into his brain that the policeman's horse must have lost its footing, and the rider was being swept into the rapidly rising torrent.

It was something that slipped and stretched upon which his fingers hooked, and blind though the snatch was, his grip held fast, although the sudden violent strain upon the muscles all but wrenched the fingers apart. Later, when a fuller consciousness of things personal returned to him, he discovered that he had parted with three of his finger nails, but at the moment he felt no twinge of pain.

Blind, with the deadly weight dragging on his arm, scarcely knowing what he was doing, Heweitt leaned forward in the high stock saddle, yelling madly to his pony. But that staunch little brute was already doing all it knew. No English horseman's knee grip could have held Heweitt in his place during those awful seconds; but the cowpuncher rides by balance, by habit rather than will, adapting himself to strains and pressures. Feet braced in the stirrups, Heweitt somehow retained his seat.

Ten seconds later, ten seconds of earthly purgatory

for stiffened rider and struggling animal, and the fateful storm had swept over and beyond the creek—no longer a placid stream but a raging torrent—and Heweitt was encouraging his panting cayuse to the opposite bank. From his right arm trailed the soaked and limp figure of Glyn.

That the Corporal was still living was little short of a miracle. By the time Heweitt had spread a dripping blanket upon the four inches of part dissolved ice that covered the ground and had laid the policeman upon it, the storm had rolled so far onwards that the strokes of the hail sounded as no more than a mere pattering. Without hesitation Heweitt raised the head of the three-fourths-dead corporal and poured a few drops of whisky down his throat.

"Son, how're you feeling?" he asked.

"Know I'm alive; that's about all," gasped Glyn.

"Soon as you can," went on Heweitt cheerfully; "you'll get up and move about right smart. Cold and wet, this is no place for loafing. Feel hurt anywhere? I can't find any bones broken."

Glyn shook his head feebly. "Reckon I'm all right—soon will be."

The whisky had driven back the chill, and with movement bringing back warmth, Glyn soon declared himself well enough, though more uncomfortable it would have been impossible for a man to be.

"Well, son, seeing you're on your legs again, I'll be off," said Heweitt.

The corporal started. "Off!" he repeated vaguely.

"Why sure." Heweitt smiled. "No need to stay here, is there? You'll be clearing, too. But my way isn't your way."

And then Glyn understood, and a disconcerted expression came into his face. He was helpless. His horse was gone, swept from under him, and Heaven alone knew where by now; his revolver was useless,

his carbine departed. Furthermore he was as weak as a ten-year-old child.

But the corporal was a good loser. He smiled, although it was a rueful smile, as he looked at Heweitt.

"Guess it's your say-so that goes this time," he admitted. "I can't prevent you. Well, Heweitt, the call's yours. I throw up my hand."

Heweitt laughed.

"Give it to me, you mean—that is," for there came swift recollection; "that is if you aren't ashamed to shake hands with an outlaw."

Glyn's face showed serious, but quickly relaxed. "I'll shake hands, and only too gladly," he said; "with the man to whom I owe my life—for the second time."

"Then we're both content."

And their hands met in a long hard clasp.

Motionless, the corporal watched the second successful fight of Heweitt's stout-hearted pony to cross the flooded creek. He answered the wave of the hand sent from the opposite bank, and he watched the outlaw's figure grow smaller and smaller. Then he turned his face in the opposite direction.

"The damned luck!" he ejaculated.

But whether he was referring to Heweitt's escape, or his own, or to the fifteen-mile walk ahead of him before the nearest police post was reached, is matter for conjecture.

CHAPTER XII

AN ALLY

IT is symptomatic of the natural ingratitude of human kind that, within an hour of leaving Corporal Glyn and immediate hope of prison on the further side of Pine Creek, Hewitt was cursing, fluently and viciously, the unhappy condition in which he found himself.

His garments were just soaked rags and he was chilled to the bone; he couldn't feel the stirrups with his feet, and his teeth persisted in chattering; so much had the hailstorm and the icy waters of Pine Creek done for him. On the other hand the causes of his discomfort were answerable for the fading of the gaol into the back part of the picture. He had not forgotten this, but every moment he was being acutely reminded that he stood in sore need of warmth and food. For the first it was not expedient to delay; the second he could not lay his hands upon.

His cayuse was showing symptoms of fatigue, and floundered at a heavy gait over the soggy ground, with its three-inch layer of half-melted ice and water, spraying Hewitt's legs with a freezing shower.

His aim was to make the abandoned ranch on the Clearwater, lay up for a day or so, and then travel north. That Glyn would lose no time getting on his trail he knew. To add to his troubles, the sun, which had showed signs of breaking through was again

obscured, and rain began to fall heavily. More slowly and with greater labour the pony moved, and Heweitt abandoned the idea of the ranch. Forsaking the trail, he made for a patch of thick timber and shoved himself into its densest recesses.

A big weariness was upon him. A fire was hopeless. Unsaddling his pony he rolled himself in his soddened blanket beneath a dripping tree.

His sleep, however, was fitful. Hard gaspings, exclamations, and half-formed sentences escaped his lips, his limbs jerked and thrust, his fists clenched. Once again he was fighting, in the middle of the swollen creek, with straining muscles battling for a human life. Once he suddenly awakened to find himself sitting bolt upright, his arms going through the motions of rowing, and he was telling someone that she made "a pretty picture." Crouched again in the blanket, he could not prevent his mind from dwelling upon Amy, and hard and bitter were the thoughts that came to him. And then abruptly he found himself looking down into the big steadfast eyes of Hope Marley, a revolver in his hand, its muzzle pressing against her broad forehead. She had refused something, he knew not what, and he was feeling angry and of brutal intention.

Thoroughly awakened, Heweitt made no further attempt at sleep. To bodily wretchedness his dream had added mental misery. Huddled up and shivering, he lay with upturned face, staring into the solid blackness overhead, his brain a welter of dismal reflections, gloomy anticipations and self-accusations. But he stopped short at self-pity. Honesty was not beguiled from him by his dismal condition, and he blamed neither Fate nor Amy for the afflictions he was enduring.

Unable longer to remain still, he dragged himself to his feet and stumbled back and forth over the soft

ground, that the exercise might bring some warmth into his chilled body. Until at long last came a pallid lightening of the dense gloom. Never before, even when on night herd, with a rising wind and the rumble of the thunder of a distant storm agitating his charges, had he so welcomed the approach of dawn. With the first streaks of light filtering through the tangled branches he was blundering among the timber in search of his pony, strayed he knew not where.

For a half-hour maybe he wandered until at the edge of a tiny clearing he abruptly stopped, staring at a kneeling man who had been engaged in trying to build a fire. His eyes were fixed on the timber. The fire lighter remained stiff as a wooden figure, the right hand excepted, and this crept almost imperceptibly towards the near hip. With fingers closed on the butt of a Colt 45, the stranger discovered confidence.

"Lost anything, stranger?" he demanded.

Heweitt stepped into the open, the man's wary, stealthy eyes never leaving his face, but he said nothing, until the outlaw was no more than six paces distant, and then he rose to his feet in one movement, gun half drawn, eyes threatening.

"What ye want?"

"Fire, warmth," croaked the outlaw.

The man eyed him curiously, taking him in from head to foot. He was an undersized man, in a torn shirt that had once been red, and moleskin trousers tucked into high boots. A patched coat clothed his bowed shoulders. A man of middle age he seemed, with a dark, ragged beard and shaggy eyebrows. His face was dirty and his clothes mud-splashed. A cast in his left eye gave him an unprepossessing appearance. On the ground near him lay a slicker and a huddle of blankets.

"Waal, I'll have a fire goin' if this blamed wood'll start to burn," he said after a lengthy pause.

There was no welcome in his manner, and whatever the suspicions with which the sight of Heweitt had filled him, they seemed barely relieved by the other man's plain lack of interest in himself.

"On yer own?" he asked, sinking to his knees again, but still keeping his eyes on the outlaw.

"Yes, hurry with that fire," returned Heweitt impatiently. He moved still closer. "I'm frozen."

"It's sure cold," the man muttered and struck a match; but his whole attention was not absorbed by the fire making, and his hand was prompt for a return to the revolver butt.

"Cold! Cold as hell," chattered Heweitt.

A wisp of smoke that grew and widened rose up from the pile in the heart of which flickered a tiny point of flame. Heweitt plumped on his knees, arms and chest almost touching the upreared sticks.

"Wet, hey?" remarked the man.

Heweitt nodded.

"It's a poor camp, that's gotten no fire."

"It is."

"But after yes'day." The man gave his opinion of yesterday's storm in fervid language.

"Got caught in her, you, hey?" he went on.

"Yes."

Indifferent to his companion, the outlaw was huddling over the smoke, trying to absorb as much as possible of the faint heat the reluctantly lighting wood was giving forth. The bearded man continued to watch him.

"Gathered this wood yes'day. Slept with it," the latter explained. "Camp close by?"

"Saddle's yonder." Heweitt jerked back his head, impatient that he should be forced to speak when his whole soul was intent upon the thawing of

the deadly cold out of his body. "Horse strayed. Looking for him when I saw you."

The other man nodded absently. He was still scanning Heweitt.

"Reckon she'll go ahead now," he volunteered, indicating the fire, the smoke from which was lessening. "Grub?"

"None."

The little black eyes widened, then glinted with sudden suspicion. The man seemed unable to make up his mind. All at once his teeth showed amid the tangle of dark hair in a grin; one eyelid closed and he slapped a hand gently on his thigh.

"Waal, stranger," he said, his voice a little more amiable; "mebbe yer worser off 'n me. I got a meal or two left. Will ye eat?"

Heweitt nodded. "Glad to. I'm hungry as well as chilled," he said.

"Reckon we kin fix that up," said the other briskly; and he fished a long bag out from under his blankets.

"Go an' find yer horse, stranger, while I gets grub pile ready," he advised. "Won't do fer ye to be left afoot. Reckon he won't have strayed far in this timber."

It was sensible advice, as Heweitt realized. For him to be without a horse was a misfortune the size of which was beyond exaggeration. Feeling his blood beginning to circulate again, he rose from beside the fire and began to search, whistling softly.

"Woodchopper," was his mental summing up of the man he had met.

Within a quarter of an hour he had found the cayuse. The rope had unhooked and coiling about the brush had checked far straying. On his way back to the fire Heweitt recovered and brought along saddle and blanket. A most agreeable smell tickled his

nostrils as he made devious way back to the well-hidden camp upon which he had so fortuitously stumbled.

There was bacon and bannock awaiting in a filthy frypan. He squatted again by the fire, and the man was pouring coffee into a tin mug from a battered gallipot. He shoved the mug towards Heweitt—his guest. Himself, he was content to drink straight from the pot.

“ Ah-h ! ”

Heweitt set down the empty mug with a gasp of content. The thick coffee, muddy, rather burned, was hot, strong, and as nectar to the palate of a man who had fasted for twenty-four hours. It brought a reinvigorating warmth into the body.

“ Help yerself partner,” said the host hospitably, cutting the bannock in halves with a big sheath-knife and harpooning two slabs of bacon with the same instrument.

And Heweitt did. It was food he wanted—something to eat, not to tickle his palate. The man watched him with interest. There was a noticeable change in his manner. Suspicion had departed, giving place to a sort of covert satisfaction. He was attentive, pressing further food upon Heweitt, offering eager condolences upon the obvious ill effects of the storm. He was deferentially boisterous, anxious to avoid any hint of opposition, almost obsequious. He seemed more than willing to prove his kindly interest and wish to be of use. In fact, he rather overplayed the part; and in his manner, so different from the rough-and-ready, take-it-for-granted hospitality of the frontier, which carries no direct motive behind it and gives as readily and unreservedly as it receives, the outlaw saw a calculated friendliness. To one such as himself this carried the taint of suspicion, and Heweitt began to consider his host with more care.

His guest's hunger satisfied, the man promptly passed across a great plug of tobacco. Heweitt took it readily. His own store had become wholly saturated during the double passage of the flooded creek, and it had been one of the minor miseries of the past night that he had been denied the relief of smoking.

"She's a peach an' no fatal error. Allowed she meant drowndin' the hull country," the man observed genially, puffing freely. "I saw her comin' and lit out fer cover quick. But judgin' by things, partner, she seems to have surrounded you all right."

"The hailstorm? Yes," returned Heweitt.

"Catch you up, or ride into her?" the other enquired casually.

Heweitt looked at him quickly. This was clumsily hid curiosity, which he found no inclination to satisfy.

"I had no chance to hit shelter," he said.

The man nodded. "That stretch by Pine Creek is a sure onlucky place to be caught," he said.

Other questions he put, awkwardly cunning, but Heweitt was not to be drawn. Finally the man became direct.

"Waal, partner," he said, "my way lies north. If that's yer way mebbe we can ride a short ways together. I got a plenty of grub an' fixins. There's mighty few fam'lies hereabouts where a man can call for a snack."

"That so?"

Heweitt was feeling he would like the situation better if he had a gun in his possession. He felt convinced the man suspected, if he were not indeed assured of, his identity, and hospitality was not an unheard-of preliminary to the earning of a large-sized police reward.

"If you're keeping a date, don't you worry about me," he said indifferently. "I'm in no hurry."

"Same here, pard," his companion hastened to

assure him. "Time's my own"; and he sniggered. "Some fellows are always in a hell of a hurry, but that ain't me. But I allowed as yer alone, me the same, an' this yer's a mighty lonesome country, meb-be we might get along together."

He waited a while, covertly watching his companion, a faint grin hiding under his beard; then he laughed suddenly.

"Mebbe, pard, you prefers it lonesome?" he suggested, and added, "Like me. Me, I've no use for cities an' such places."

"And you suggest I'm the same?"

"Waal, pard——" the man ostentatiously covered both knees with his dirty, hairy hands; he leaned forward, a look intended to be ingratiating in his little eyes. "Waal, pard, as a straight proposition now—ain't you Steve Hewitt?"

"Well, and what about it?" returned the outlaw as he straightened up, muscles tensed ready to spring.

But there was no call. The other did not shift, his hands remained displayed, and there crept into his eyes an admiration, almost an envy, as when some small boy finds himself actually in close company with an athlete whose name is a household word.

"Yer are Hewitt. Allowed I'd made no mistake," the fellow cried, satisfaction great and obvious. "My name's Macinery."

Across the burned down fire they eyed each other, the one alert, suspicious, hard of eye and mouth, the other half smiling, admiring, deferential. Hewitt was irresistibly reminded of his first day at the public school in England, when he had been called up and recognized in his caller Devereux, the captain of the school eleven, who, the previous summer, had actually been asked to play for his county.

"Jake Macinery," the man repeated. "Yer'll have heard the name?" he said anxiously.

Heweitt shook his head, and Macinery looked slightly depressed.

"Police wanted me. That blow-off at Shepherd's down by Low Crossin', in th' Belly River country. Five months back that was. Had a hell of a time, but the blamed police ain't trailed me yet." He spoke with a sort of mild pride.

"Y'see, I got away an' I means keepin' loose," he went on eagerly. "That Shepherd was a mean cuss—plumb yaller all through. I dodged the redcoats all right. Now I means goin' north. Been over th' country before. There's a trail up th' Clearwater plumb to Rocky Mountain House, an' another I know straight into these dam mountains, an' so to B.C. Allowed as you might be willin' to come along. What d'ye say, pard? I'm straight, I am. Honest's me front name. I've heard of you Heweitt, an' what you done, an' I'll be proud to ride along with ye."

The end of it was Heweitt agreed, though scornful of himself for accepting such aid. There was no strong appeal in the everyday companionship of a self-confessed murderer; he had not left behind all the old class prejudices; but the chance of making a clear get-away from the country was a lure not to be resisted. He did not believe Macinery was a trickster. If he proved to be, so much the worse for him.

On the second day, at a ranch on the lower reaches of the river, Heweitt made good his defective armoury. He went alone. He held up the cook, the only man on the premises, with an empty revolver, disarmed him, collected an eight-shot Winchester repeater with suitable ammunition, the cook's own gun, an extra blanket, and a sackful of grub. Aware of the tendencies of the cowpunching tribe, he thoughtfully tied the disconsolate "doctor" to the leg of the kitchen table before bidding him adieu.

That day Macinery and he made sixty-five miles,

and camped on a bluff from which could be seen, on the other side of the great river, the remains of an old chimney, and the tumble-down walls of what had once been Rocky Mountain House, that historic post of the Hudson Bay Company which had been a centre of fur trading with the Indians and white trappers for years before a settlement in Alberta was ever dreamed of.

But when they walked down to the river after breakfast, disappointment awaited them. The accustomed ford had vanished, obliterated by a five-foot rise of dark water that slopped heavily between the banks with a sullen persistency suggesting weeks of flood water.

"That fixes us," said Macinery, staring gloomily across the wide expanse.

"We'll swim."

"Not when she's like that, pard, I know her. It's sure death."

When Heweitt had been hauled back to the bank at the end of their ropes knotted together he was compelled to admit that Macinery was right.

Luck was out, and the position was the more tantalizing for the knowledge that on the further side was a well-beaten Indian trail that led directly into the mountains through the great gap in the stupendous walls the river had carved for itself; and once through the mountain freedom lay right ahead.

"Well," said Heweitt; "since we can't get to the gap by the other side of the river, we'll make it from this side."

"There's no trail," objected Macinery.

"We'll cut our own."

And they tried. For ten days the pair worked harder than galley slaves, fighting primeval forest and muskeg. Now a windfall would obstruct them and half an hour would be spent in making a way for

their ponies. They spent hours trying to force a path through abundant and tenacious mud that smelled all the way to glory when disturbed.

The rain fell incessantly. Night after night, soaked to the skin, every joint and muscle aching like fury, they wrapped themselves in sodden blankets and with mud below and rain above tried to sleep. A fire was out of the question. For those ten days they knew not the meaning of dryness or warmth, nor the taste of cooked food. They existed on raw soddered bacon. It was sure disheartening.

"We'll never make her. I'm quitting," Macinery said more than once.

"Do as you like, I'm keeping on," Heweitt told him.

And he made it clear to his companion that the grub they had along with them would go with him. With freedom at stake there was no room for the observance of another's needs. Without grub, even raw sowbelly, it would be impossible to reach the gap. Not a head of game came within sight the whole ten days. Recognizing the dominant spirit of his companion, Macinery submitted.

Finally the gap came into view—the doorway into the promised land. Here Macinery took the lead, knowing a trail which crossed the river at a ford—a ford no longer—and crept like a serpent along a rocky ridge running parallel with the river and a bare two feet above its frothy, creaming surface. It was a road to try a man's nerve, available only for traveling in single file, where a slip into the river meant certain death. Thence the trail zig-zagged downwards until it reached the very brink of the black, forbidding cañon through which the river found its stormy way.

"Better wait till morning," Macinery advised.

But Heweitt would not have it so. There was no

place to camp, and a fever of excitement possessed him. Macinery was for objecting, but a glance at Heweitt's face decided him. Afoot they made the attempt.

Within half an hour the sky blackened and a furious thunderstorm burst over them. Dark as night became the cañon, and they could barely see to go on, the only guide to placing their feet the vivid illumination of the awful flashes of lightning that darted from cliff to cliff. The rain fell in torrents. To stand still was out of the question; for the ponies, scared all to pieces by the terrible lightning and the deafening clamour of the thunder that boomed amid the mountains like the discharge of heavy artillery, reared and plunged madly when not on the move, threatening disaster at any moment. To attempt to turn back would have been suicidal.

At length Macinery reached the narrow ledge of the trail where it fairly entered the heart of the gap. He moved slowly and sideways, back to the rock, so narrow the path became. Suddenly he let out a yell, but it was smothered by a mighty crash of thunder. Heweitt, following up behind, found himself in collision with the hindquarters of Macinery's cayuse. Cow ponies that kick are a rarity, but this one, bewildered by the stunning thunderclaps, wholly demoralized by the inferno they had entered, swerved towards the river as it felt the impact; knocking Heweitt from his foothold. For an agonizing moment the outlaw felt himself treading on nothing as he dropped to the extent of his arm. The grip upon his pony's bridle saved him. There was a jerk that almost dislocated his shoulder, and then his clawing feet rested on a base, and before he had had time to realize how narrow had been the escape from certain destruction, a violent jerk of his pony's head yanked him back to the trail.

"I say, she's gone!"

Macinery's bellowing voice, holding a note of terror, reached Heweitt as a mere whisper.

"Gone! What's gone?" he yelled back.

A dazzling lightning stroke gave him a momentary glimpse of his companion's face, of a ghastly lividness, terror stamped in every lineament. Then the picture was blotted out and a deafening, head-splitting thundercrack reverberated through the gap and crashed among the surrounding cliffs.

"What is it?" shouted Heweitt.

In the brief period of comparative quiet succeeding the last peal he heard Macinery's answer:

"She's gone. There's no more trail."

There was not. The river had washed it away.

There was no escaping into British Columbia by that road.

They waited, every nerve and faculty keyed up to utmost pitch, soothing the ponies, with feet slipping on the wet rock, until the storm had spent its strength, the dense gloom enwrapping them grew less, and they had the use of their eyes to assist them in removal from their hazardous situation. To turn the ponies was impossible, but at length the animals allowed themselves to be backed by inches at a time, until the ledge widened somewhat and a deep recess in the containing wall of rock permitted of their being turned about.

Then followed the retracing of their steps up the incline; and when the top was reached, cold as was the mountain air, both men were dripping with sweat, their knees sagged, they shivered as men with the ague. Only with a big effort were their clenched fingers relaxed from the ponies' heads. From their labouring chests the breath escaped in wheezing gasps.

"If Heaven was at the other end o' that trail I

wouldn't try her again," asserted Macinery emphatically.

A fortnight later they were lying hid up in a derelict shack, which some woodsman or prospector had abandoned in the thick timber country on the confines of what is now the Canadian National Park.

CHAPTER XIII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

MACINERY came into the shack whistling, his step brisk and confident as he made for the blazing fire. Steve Heweitt, lying full length on his back in a rude bunk along the wall, appeared oblivious of his entry.

"Our luck's been dead out, partner, but I sure believe she's taken a tilt our way at last," remarked Macinery, rubbing his hands.

"What is it?"

Heweitt's voice was indifferent; he did not turn his head. This was the third week in the shack, and he was filled to the back teeth with dissatisfaction. And this, considering he was an outlaw, was sheer ingratitude. The shack had been patched until it was warm and snug. Timber was plentiful and great fires of pine logs neutralized the keenness of the mountain cold. Grub was not lacking, and of tobacco he had a sufficiency. More than all these, since taking up residence, they had been worried by no sign of their enemy.

"True, there was no guarantee but that any day might introduce a policeman. Unless hunting game—and then one did not go far for fear of meeting with an inquisitive game-warden—there was absolutely nothing to do except eat, sleep, and think—and the last was no unmixed pleasure. Heweitt would have

cheerfully given twenty dollars for a book to read. The company of Jake Macinery was not such as a man of gentle upbringing, of a cultivated intelligence, and with tastes that went beyond mere animal pleasures, would have gone out of his way to seek. Shut up in a ten-by-sixteen shack, it was impossible to get away from his companion.

The result, with Heweitt, was a restlessness, a certain brittleness of temper that demanded outlet.

For the present there was no getting out of the country. The normal trails were too dangerous, recognition a foregone conclusion. And a way across such a barrier as the Rockies except by defined routes is not easy. Amongst mountains you travel where you are able, not where you like.

"What is it, partner!" repeated Macinery. "Why a dead sure thing, a cinch. A kid of twelve couldn't miss it if he tried. So plumb easy it sorter makes me feel ashamed of myself."

"Well, out with it then," returned Heweitt irritably.

"Sure, ain't I tellin' ye?" said Macinery, good temperedly.

And he went on to relate that, while out with a rifle, he had fallen in with a young man who had been acting as chainman to a surveying party. He suffered from a slack jaw, and had hailed one willing to listen to him as a godsend. Amongst other items of information he had made known that an optimistic person at Lacombe meant running a stage to the township of Laggan. The service would be weekly, and the first coach was due at Laggan in four days' time.

"Well, I'm not wanting to be at either end of the trip," said Heweitt. "I don't know if you are."

"No, but we might meet th' stage somewhere between"; and Macinery winked.

"I've no use for stages."

"But there'll be a chance made for us, pard," Macinery protested. "A feller'll be in that first coach so plumb full of dollars his pockets are just leakin'. On his way to Golden, buyin' a mine, accordin' to that loose-jawed son-of-a-gun. Say, but it's a chance made for us, pard."

He waited, but there came no response from Heweitt, who was staring at the rafters, reflecting on the sure truth that it is impossible to touch pitch without becoming defiled.

He knew well enough what Macinery was hinting at, and his whole being revolted. He had not discovered any qualms against the holding up of the Edmonton stage, but this proposition of Macinery's seemed on a different footing. It was robbery just for robbery's sake—because he was an outlaw, whereas the Edmonton hold-up was a means to a definite end.

And yet—why not? What did it really matter? He was a "wolf"; why not act up to the name? Robbery was robbery, whatever the object. And the excitement was a provocation. Life, hid up in the shack, was a cursedly depressing business. One might as well be in gaol. He sat up abruptly.

"But partner, you don't seem to catch on. I ain't meanin' to *buy* the stage," Macinery was patiently explaining. "We got to have —"

"That's all right," Heweitt interrupted him, "I was thinking out just where we could best operate. They'll take the trail through the Red Deer valley, eh?"

"Sure, Heweitt, that's what the talkin' machine fellow said," replied Macinery, his face showing much relief. "There's no other, unless they're wantin' to be held up by water constant. The Red Deer's their easy way—our's too."

"At the bend this side of Ghost Creek, where the trail dips into the split of Forked Hill, eh? Yes, as you say, it's a chance made for us."

Heweitt assented, his spirits already rising with the hope of excitement.

"Did this fellow you met tell you where they change horses?" he asked.

"No, and I sure forgot to ask him," admitted Macinery. "But I reckon it ain't of much importance. Tired or fresh, they'll pull up all right when the driver sees that holdin' on's the short road to his coffin."

The next morning, with grub for four days in their bags, they left the shack, and hit a trail northward that would strike the Red Deer somewhere in the neighbourhood where the hold-up should take place. There was no need to tire the ponies, since they had little more than forty miles to cover. Conversation, as usual, was scanty. Macinery, whose range of topics was limited, had learned that his companion was not only discouraging as a listener, but also appeared to own a prejudice against doing much talking on his own account.

Macinery was forming the opinion that his fellow outlaw was something of a disappointment. Amongst outlaws, the murderer argued, it was ridiculous to admit of social differences; yet, a dozen times a day, in deed if not in word, Heweitt contrived to impress upon his not too intelligent mind that a whole world of distinction lay between them.

There was a cool aloofness about him which Jake could never get past. He could see no reason for the assumption of any leadership amongst two, but his companion contrived to put it there somehow, indefinitely, but beyond all doubt. The feelings of respect and admiration that had been with him when Heweitt and he first met were weakening.

Preparations for ensuring the success of the hold-up were leisurely but thorough. Meeting with nothing to cause uneasiness, they scouted along the Red Deer valley trail for several miles and found a place ideally suited to their requirements. Heweitt said he was satisfied anyway, and Macinery did not contradict him.

It was at a point where the trail, temporarily forsaking the line of the river that the configuration of the hills forced into taking a hairpin bend, crept through a narrow gap that suggested the splitting of the rocky spur by a titanic wedge. The sides of this gap were clothed with masses of forest timber, dark pines prevailing, providing excellent lurking places. Near the western end, a deep cross cañon entered the gap, and through this a trail of sorts, practicable for ponies, wound away amongst the hills, a perfect labyrinth of rock and pine seldom trodden except by the Indian game hunter. Here was a retreat where one might lie up for months with little fear of discovery.

"You attend to the driver, Macinery, while I look after the passengers," directed Heweitt. "And don't let there be any shooting unless the driver loses his head."

"If that happens he'll never know anything about it," said Macinery. "Leave him to me."

The psychology of a hold-up, stage or train, can never be satisfactorily explained. The average person fails to understand, and is hardly to be convinced against his understanding, how it should be possible for a couple of men, sometimes even one man, so to intimidate a coach or car-load of his fellows, some of whom will not be cowards, most of them carrying weapons and well instructed in their use, that resistance is not attempted. To realize why and how this can happen a man must go through the experience.

Heweitt realized it all right, so did Macinery, and

they were feeling anything but apprehensive of risk or failure when, on the fourth day after leaving their shack, in the middle of a cold meal, both had their interest interrupted by the faint sound of far-off galloping hoofs. The coach was coming. Without haste or fuss they got up, put together their belongings, and went each to his selected station. It was a matter-of-fact business.

The trail was a good one—for western Canada, although one used to European macadam might not have recognized it as a road at all, and the fresh-faced driver was handling his six horses cleverly, avoiding the occasional two-foot stumps and frequent rocks without undue trouble. Two of the men outside were arguing politics, while the third appeared to be asleep in spite of the incessant jolting.

"Hålt!"

As the driver flew past him Steve Heweitt jumped from his place of concealment and turned after the stage.

The shout brought Macinery into the road, so nicely placed that by the time the driver had jerked his leaders to a standstill, realizing that he was covered by a large Colt's 45, he was within comfortable talking distance.

"Shove 'em up an' keep 'em up, bo'," commanded Macinery.

"Damn you!" ejaculated the driver cheerfully. And he laughed.

The startled political opponents rose simultaneously to their feet, one letting out an oath. His hand went to his pocket.

"Drop that!" roared a voice behind, and both turned their heads.

The sight of Heweitt was sufficient. The moving hand was abruptly jerked back.

"A hold up!" exclaimed the elder of the two.

"Shut up, Fred, we can do nothing," he added philosophically and sat down again.

"Up with your hands, gentlemen," ordered Heweitt. "We shall not be detaining you long, I hope."

"Eh! What in hell!" The sleepy man behind was pulling himself upright into a vague comprehension of what had befallen.

"Don't talk."

He caught sight of the six-shooter and concluded he would not, to the robbers, anyway, though it seemed as though he had a whole lot he desired to confide to himself.

"Say, you amateurs, ain't this a joke?" began the driver.

He was a young man of cheerful humour, with a tendency towards comedy of a rude type, and the initial shock of the surprise wearing thin, it occurred to him that a practical joke was being played. But Macinery's manner should have warned him.

"Dry up, bo'."

"Keep an eye for any funny business, partner," directed Heweitt, slipping from his pony.

From the inside of the coach a man was coming out, but with a yell of alarm he stumbled back immediately upon sight of Heweitt's weapon.

"A hold up!" he gasped.

"That's what it is," snapped the outlaw. "Don't get noisy or make a fuss and you'll be all right. I'm going to trouble you for your wallets, gentlemen. Get a move on."

"But—but—this—is—Canada," stammered the man nearest him.

"That's all right. You're making no mistakes," cut in Heweitt grimly. "Also it's a hold-up. Find that money quick. I'm not camping here for the night. Cough up. This'll do."

He lifted the hat from the head of the nearer man, holding it out with significant solicitation which the gun in his other hand was ready to emphasize, when a sharp but subdued sound from the figure in one of the further corners caught his ear. It was a sound like "Oh!" gasped quickly, almost a sigh, a sob, as though a sudden pain had caught the utterer. It suggested femininity, and sharply stooping his head forward, Heweitt saw that the figure was actually that of a woman.

He stared at her, for the moment thrown off his balance, shocked, almost alarmed. He had not counted on meeting women travellers on the stage. At once he responded to his impulse.

"Don't be alarmed, madam," he said hurriedly—it was almost an apology. "You will not be hurt."

Quick came the rejoinder, the voice quite low but distinct, soft and vibrant with earnestness.

"I am not afraid. I know you will not hurt me."

A queer disturbance seized Steve Heweitt, setting every nerve in his body tingling.

"Good God!" he breathed; and into his eyes, revealed by the hole roughly cut in the mask fashioned out of a piece of black tarpaulin, leaped an expression of apprehension.

He knew that voice. Where had he heard it before?

Heedless of the two other occupants, he thrust head and shoulders further inside. But such light as the drawn canvas curtains admitted was poor. All that he could see was a woman's figure wrapped in a long dark coat. A short veil hanging from the brim of her soft felt hat assisted the gloom in obscuring her features. But he could feel her eyes upon him.

It was Hope Marley at whom he was looking.

Choking back the cry that rose in his throat, Heweitt jerked himself outside. In his left hand he

was still holding the passenger's hat, in which had been dropped a fat wallet, but he seemed unaware of it. Three strides, and he was alongside Macinery.

"Quit it. Get off," he cried in a high strained voice.

"Eh?" Macinery stared at him as though unable to comprehend—"Eh?"

"Clear out, I tell you. Damn it! have I to tell you twice?"

"But partner"; began Macinery stupidly. He was bewildered.

"It's a mistake. This coach goes through."

Macinery suddenly shouted, and the cry was drowned by the louder explosion of a pistol. One of the passengers inside had shoved his gun outside the curtain and touched the trigger, the bullet whistling between the two robbers. Carried away by rage or fear, Macinery cut loose, but the fresh-faced driver at whom he aimed had already ducked. From the side of the coach spirted a second red flash, and Macinery, staggering in his saddle as though he had received a sudden blow, overbalanced and dropped into the road. Other shots rang out, one of the men on top of the coach was firing. His companion had dropped full length. The sleepy passenger was waving his arms and shouting with excitement. Not twenty seconds had elapsed since Heweitt's first command to those inside, and in the last five a perfect tornado of sound had unloosed.

And, heard above all the din, sounded the voice of Macinery.

"It's Heweitt! Steve Heweitt, the outlaw. Stop him!"

Heweitt, pistol in hand but undischarged, turned in his tracks and ran towards his waiting pony. A man stepped from the coach, to receive squarely in the face the slung hat with the wallet inside. With

a leap Heweitt was in his saddle, and the pony, jumping at once into its stride, was tearing down the road, heading in the direction from which the coach had come. An ineffective shot or two whistled after him.

Heweitt was out of sight, and the passengers grouped about Macinery, whom someone had thoughtfully disarmed. He had been hit in the left ribs, but the wound had not affected his tongue, and he was speaking with a vicious rapidity from which the truth was promptly gathered.

"Steve Heweitt!" exclaimed the driver excitedly. "Why that's the feller there's a thousand dollars reward out for," and in a mighty haste he ran to the horses to cut the traces of one of the two leaders.

It was a chance of handling money not to be missed. The outlaw had no more than a few minutes' start, and the driver had not forgotten that at the station eleven miles back where the stage had pulled up for changing horses a corporal of the M.P. had ridden up and got off for a meal. To reach him in quick time would mean the capture of Heweitt. And the driver intended doing it, when the quiet, elderly outside passenger intervened.

"Here, hold on, driver," he shouted decisively. "There's no call for you to leave your job, and that's taking the coach along. This lady"—he glanced at Hope Marley, standing by the wheel and with God knows what agonizing thoughts and fears tearing at her heart—"and Mr. Garret, too, won't be wanting to camp out here all night. You take 'em on. I'll ride back myself. There's a chance to get that robber. One of you other fellows can bring the wounded man along to the station later."

He was a business man of Calgary and the proprietor of the newly-instituted stage, a man of the finest type that the north-west breeds, cool of brain, ready to deal with any emergency, however unlooked

for, prompt in action. Staying long enough to give a few complimentary words to Hope upon the nerve and courage she had displayed, within five minutes of Heweitt's disappearance, he had thrown himself upon the bare back of a stage horse and was hitting the backward trail at a high gait.

The erstwhile sleepy passenger volunteered to ride back in charge of Macinery, whose anger against his escaped accomplice was not lessened with the understanding that he would have to walk the eleven miles back to the changing station. The driver, with anathemas against what he considered the boss's "greediness," climbed disconsolately back to his seat and the coach proceeded on its way.

Back in her corner, miserable and unhappy beyond all words, denied the feminine relief of tears, Hope Marley was praying that the man whose safety meant so much to her might escape.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LONG CHASE

WITH a long stagger breaking into a head-long gait as though the motive power had been abruptly cut off and the last few yards covered by sheer momentum, the pony went down and rolled over, the rider extricating his feet from the stirrups and falling clear just in time to avoid being crushed.

To Heweitt, quickly scrambling to his feet, the downfall came as no surprise. Miles back, he had known the big-hearted cayuse was used-up, that straining muscles and pumping heart were near the limit of endurance; and his sympathies had gone out to the obstinately brave little animal. But he had not omitted to use quirt and spur, for horse-lover though he was, he placed a high value on his own continued existence. Yet it had been worth little enough to him these four days past, four days of racking fatigue, of little sleep and less food, and always the apprehension of something ahead upon which it was impossible to calculate.

Unable to fight, he had been compelled to run, and ill luck had stuck closer to him than a brother.

Hailed by a uniformed man as he passed the coach-changing station in the Red Deer valley, he had but increased his pace. This in itself was suspicious, and the mounted policeman happening to be Corporal

Patrick Glyn, the hunt commenced forthwith. Luckily for the outlaw, the corporal's horse was weary, and hard riding had saved Heweitt for the time being. But he was given no opportunity of easing up. Nor did he expect it after Machinery's spiteful revelation.

Northward he dared not go, since the police post at Red Deer intervened, and in the few minutes he paused to ease the cayuse at a road house by James River ferry, he heard that which destroyed his intention of seeking hiding in the Clearwater country. The proprietor informed him that the M.P. were at last making strenuous efforts to rope in "that blamed Heweitt," and that patrols were combing the country between Red Deer and the mountains.

So Heweitt turned east, passing a short and restless night at a deserted shack he happened upon in a clump of timber by Oliver's Creek. There he lay up until evening, making the most of the few mouthfuls of food in his bags.

During the night ride he crossed the Calgary-Edmonton road, turning south at the sight of a uniform in the early morning light, and hid up successfully until hunger drove him to make experiment at a ranch-house. But the cook must have seen him; for when he rode up he found the door barricaded, and a voice informed him that any attempt at a forced entrance would be met by a bullet. He did not stay long.

The same afternoon, walking his pony, he was overtaken by a horseman. Heweitt did not know the man from Adam, but he was a cantankerous person, owning an inconveniently exact memory for faces, and it happened that he had been a passenger on the Edmonton stage on which the outlaw had tried his prentice hand. This person recollected Heweitt all right, but, having a wise discretion, conveyed neither by word nor glance suggestion of the earlier acquaint-

tance. He chatted amiably and indifferently, but after the usual "So long" as between passing travelers, when his route conveniently turned aside from that pursued by Heweitt, he shoved the country hard behind him until he fell in with an M.P. scout.

By great good luck, the policeman in his turn fell in with three of his fellows who were devoting themselves entirely to Steve Heweitt. Regina headquarters had become caustic in its recent inquiries of the District Superintendent, and the ill-feeling had passed along until the lower grades were fairly on their mettle.

The four young men discovered Heweitt's trail and stuck to it with enthusiasm, showing themselves most obnoxious and persistent.

But it was a stern chase the outlaw was leading them. Like himself, though of choice, not by compulsion, they eschewed grub for the time being, and riding a large number of miles on empty stomachs, hope being a windy and unsatisfying kind of food, they cursed freely as they rode. It was not going to be their fault if they missed their quarry this time.

With Heweitt's pony falling, ridden to death, it surely looked as though their intention was soon to be made good.

For half a minute Heweitt stood staring at the animal, its hind limbs faintly shivering, the foam clotted about its lips. He was not blaming the poor brute. It had given its life for him, and the dearest of human friends can do no more. He hesitated, right hand at his hip. How far behind were his pursuers he did not know; too close he feared. And yet—

"Oh curse it!" he exclaimed roughly.

And then he was kneeling beside the listless head. A hand covered the bloodshot eyes and then his pistol cracked.

It was the least the man could do for the brave creature that had served him so well.

Snatching the Winchester from beside the saddle, he started on the dead run. He knew where he was all right. Once before he had passed along this trail that led northward into the Knee Hills from the Blackfeet Reservation, and unless his memory were at fault, somewhere at hand was the cabin of Joe Hibbert. Joe was a decent fellow—had seemed well disposed when Heweitt had passed along the trail before. No doubt he had a horse. The only question was whether the pursuers would reach him before the cabin could be found.

Ten minutes later Heweitt was snooping around the outside of a roughly-built log shack. It was dark, and he was aware the stable was built with one end on to the shack, to save labour. Having designs on the horseflesh and sufficient trouble on his hands for the time being, Heweitt was not making more noise than was necessary. The longer Joe remained in ignorance of the removal of his property the better for all concerned. So it was the back of the shack that he hit in preference to the front, and he walked delicately.

And then he heard the sound of a woman crying, a low heartbroken sobbing, and he stopped dead close against the wall, listening.

Heweitt, perhaps unfortunately, was an imaginative man, and he promptly had a picture of Mrs. Hibbert sitting in a chair, wide eyed, seeing nothing, but her mental vision most acute.

He thought of Joe, a rough frontiersman, a type of those pioneers who find no long settlement in any one place on this earth until at rest in the grave. He had seemed a decent fellow, and the notion of interference in a domestic quarrel, even at a less urgent moment, carried no appeal to the outlaw.

But intently as he listened, he could catch no other voice, no sound save the persistent hard sobbing.

An overpowering impulse, that was not born of curiosity, seized him. Forgetting the horse he needed so badly, he went swiftly round to the front of the shack, pushed open the door and stepped in.

There was none in the room beside Mrs. Hibbert, sitting as he had pictured her. She heard him, sprang quickly from her chair and came towards him, her eyes suddenly alight.

"Joe!" she cried. "What——"

Right there she stopped, perceiving the mistake she had made. She halted dead in her tracks and the light died from her eyes as swiftly as it had been born. Without recognition she stared dully at the intruder before deliberately returning to her seat.

Hewitt's eyes followed her in wonder. The change that had swept her face had been as awful as it had been swift. It hurt him. What in the name of heaven could have happened to this plain-faced woman, made yet more unattractive by her grief and the poor light of the cheap, smoky lamp hanging above a rough table laden with a clutter of dirty crockery and the scraps of a meal?

"What is the trouble? Where is Joe?" he asked.

He repeated the question twice before she gave any sign of having heard him; then she shook her head.

"Any harm come to Joe?" Hewitt tried again. "Is he hurt?"

And at that the woman turned on him swiftly, almost as if challenging him.

"Who says as my man is hurt?" she demanded with an oddly defiant fierceness. "Who told you that swine could hurt my man?" Then her voice became dull and expressionless. "He ain't here. He's away. What d'you want?"

Hewitt had swift recollection of the four riders up-

on his trail, but by some queer trick its corollary evaded him.

"What's the matter? Is there anything I can do for you?" he cried impetuously.

The woman shook her head, almost impatiently.

"Joe's done all's to be done," she said wearily.

"He took his hoss an' rid over soon as I told him."

And at that Heweitt knew his stay was unprofitable, for Joe Hibbert owned but the one horse. To look into an empty stable was waste of time. Every minute was bringing his pursuers nearer, but something seemed to hold him back from hastening away. To leave the woman alone in the shack with her untold sorrow was impossible. He was hesitating when a fresh emotion gripped Mrs. Hibbert. Dropping her hands she stood up by the chair.

"And that's four hours agone. My God, so it is!" She burst forth, her voice shrill with fear, her wild eyes fixed upon Heweitt. "Four hours! Time to get to Kacheff's twice over. And me never thinkin' of it! Lord ha' mercy, something has happened to Joe, or he'd been back to me before now."

She ran at the wholly mystified man, clutching him above the elbows, shaking him, scraggy woman though she was, in the strength of her sudden passion.

"Go an' find him for God's sake," she screamed. "Find him! Am I to lose both of them? Now, now. Four hours he's gone, an' Kacheff's but nine miles away. Both of 'em, both of 'em! It'll sure kill me."

And with that she collapsed on the floor, beating at it with her clenched fists, weeping hysterically, moaning incoherent appeals. And Heweitt was still in the dark.

It was madness, but Heweitt could not have left her had he known the police were at the shack door. In his flask were a few mouthfuls of whisky, and he forced the woman to swallow them. Presently she

became more controlled, and he learned upon what strange tragedy he had so curiously stumbled.

A man named Kacheff, their nearest neighbour, had stolen her child. This was in revenge for the loss of a horse which the foreigner alleged Joe Hibbert had stolen from him. No, she hadn't proof it was Kacheff, but she knew it was so. Billy, six years of age, had been left by himself in the cabin, and on her return after half an hour's absence, Billy was missing. She had hunted unsuccessfully until Joe's return, and then had convinced him Kacheff had carried off the child. Taking his rifle, Joe had at once ridden off to Kacheff's ranch. That was four hours back. Yes, Joe would surely shoot if Kacheff refused to give up their child, he might shoot anyway. But it seemed likely Kacheff had shot first, Joe not having returned.

"And if Joe's come to hurt, you'll kill the man who's done it? Swear that you'll kill him," the woman concluded, her fierce eyes staring into Heweitt's. "I'd be goin' right now to do it myself, but 'stay here' says Joe 'until I gets back,' 'nd I'm stayin'."

She had risen from the chair where Heweitt had lifted her, her face lined and hard, the skin dry without freshness, the type of women who had followed the early pioneers westward across the great continent; bony and lean, enduring of body and spirit, hard by nature and training; a woman lacking most of the graces of her sex; knowing no life save that of hard, unending toil, but a woman, none the less; and beneath an exterior unlovely and unprepossessing, carrying a wifely and a maternal love not a whit less strong and earnest than that belonging to the most carefully nurtured and educated of her sex.

When such a woman sheds tears they are drops wrung from her very heart.

She was asking more of Heweitt than she could possibly know, and for the moment the man hesitated.

Doubtless her story was true enough and his sympathy was with her. But sympathy was a barely adequate justification of the hazard her demand involved.

He would be a fool to engage in so quixotic an undertaking. He was no knight errant, anyway, but a hunted man who had already, perhaps, wasted his last chance of escape. He had enough troubles of his own without saddling himself with those of others.

The woman went on talking. She was describing the location of Kacheff's house, but he merely heard the words. He was listening with ears and brain for the hoof strokes of the police.

And then came the straw that turned the scale in which his decision was balancing.

"You ain't a hoss, hev you?" asked Mrs. Hibbert. "I didn't hear none when you come up."

He shook his head. "My pony dropped dead half a mile back."

"Waal, there's a hoss in the stable—the one Kacheff says as my man stole from him, but he's a liar. Take it; an' if it's the worst has happened, if I've lost both of 'em, Billy and my man, you'll see that the murderer pays for 'em? God! it's not knowin' that's drivin' me crazy."

"I'll see about it," Heweitt muttered.

And his hasty turning out of the room cut short what further she would have said.

In ten seconds Heweitt was at the stable door and had burst it open. A stamping of hoofs heartened him. There was a horse—the horse of which he had given up all hopes. Why in hell hadn't the woman told him before?

He felt his way to the animal's head and unloosed it. He did not wait to hunt up a saddle, not even to find bit and bridle, though for all he knew the brute might be unbroken and unmanageable except under

forcible threat of a broken jaw. Already too much precious time had been spent, he could not afford to be particular as to trifles. He must trust to his horseman's skill and to luck. Luck surely owed him something. A head rope would have to be sufficient. Leading the animal forth, the next instant he was upon its back.

He felt the spring of the movement beneath him and he knew at once he was across something that was real horseflesh.

His heart lifted. He had a chance after all.

With a slap of his hat he sent the horse galloping into the gathering darkness, the animal responding willingly. But the gait was insufficient to suit the rider's need. Again he slammed his hat down hard upon the taut flesh back of his thigh and thrust in his spurs. Faster, faster he must go to make up for his late folly. But, instead of increasing its pace, the horse, resenting such treatment, checked, threw up its head and began to fight, snorting viciously as it plunged and bucked. And without a bit to curb its infernal pride and temper the rider was all but helpless. Keep its head down he might not. It was all he could do to retain his seat.

Cursing and flogging, gripping the headrope with iron fingers, Steve Hewitt fought to convince the partly broken brute that a master was upon its back. And at last he conquered, but not until valuable time had been spent. Trembling in every limb, its inferiority admitted, the animal at last ceased to curve its back and see-saw its fine head, and it responded to a final flogging by darting off at express speed.

Mile after mile was reeled off till the outlaw's apprehensions gradually weakened and his spirits rose. He could not be far from the Knee Hills, he reckoned, and once there he had good hopes of giving his pursuers the slip. More than one secure hiding-place did

he know of. The police were smart fellows, but they had not corralled Heweitt yet. His luck still held.

Luck! As the word came into his brain he suddenly laughed. Oh, yes! but he was the lucky man! It was the right word for the man who has lost a wife, friends, the possessions once his, his good name—everything, except his freedom—and the torturing recollection of Hope Marley.

Abruptly he jerked his hand and the horse stopped dead.

Thoughts of Hope Marley had suggested to him the woman he had left in Joe Hibbert's shack, with staring tormented eyes and every nerve in agony, who believed he was riding to the finding of her man and her child.

Humbled, shamed, he turned his horse and rode back along the trail.

CHAPTER XV

SECOND THOUGHTS

SLIPPING from the black horse, Heweitt shoved open the door of Hibbert's cabin. No fine notions of well-doing uplifted him. He was afraid to meet the eyes of Mrs. Hibbert, but the ordeal had to be gone through.

"What of th' kid—an' Joe?" Mrs. Hibbert was across the room and facing him before he was well over the threshold. "Have you found 'em?"

The answer, though not the full truth, was written in his face, and in the burning look that sprang into the woman's eyes, Heweitt received his punishment. He bent his head in contrition beyond all words.

The woman had trusted him. And he had failed her.

"I'm sorry, but I forgot your directions for finding Kacheff's," he said humbly.

"Oh!"

That was all; but all that it meant the man knew he deserved.

She told him afresh; and saying nothing he went from the shack dry lipped, not daring to give the suffering wife and mother assurance that this time he meant doing all that he could, even to the sacrifice of his life, for the alleviation of her torment.

There was a moon, clear and white, riding the sky with a hard definition of outline telling of autumn near

at hand, and he had small difficulty in locating where the trail to Kacheff's ranch broke away near to the edge of a poplar grove, to follow the course of a steep-banked creek along an open timbered valley. To this trail he held for half an hour at fast gait, until his horse, shying suddenly, came down, shooting Heweitt six feet ahead.

Impact with something soft saved Heweitt a bad fall, and having satisfied himself as to the safety of the scared and trembling horse, he cast about for the cause.

He discovered it easily enough—the carcass of a horse lying undiscernible in the pit-black shadow of a bunch of timber. Two minutes later, he had found the owner also—a man lying huddled on his side close against a tree trunk, a rifle clasped between his hands. Heweitt's searching fingers grasped moist clothing and no light was necessary to tell him the cause of the dampness.

The man was Joe Hibbert, as Heweitt had guessed before lifting the limp body into the moonlight. Somewhere near at hand was likely to be the dwelling of "the foreigner."

Straightening out the long lean body, Heweitt made a swift examination. He had expected the man dead, and his muttered "Thank God!" when he learned otherwise was heartfelt. Hibbert had fainted—from loss of blood flowing from a bullet hole high up in the thigh. But dead the man would have been but for the merest accident. Keeling over as the bullet struck, he had fallen with his weapon beneath him, and the pressure of the flat of the stock upon the flesh above the wound had lessened to an appreciable extent the flow of blood.

Having bound a ripped shirt-sleeve, tightened by means of a rude tourniquet, over the bullet hole, Heweitt turned his attention to bringing the man

round. Water from the creek dashed over the grey face brought him from unconsciousness, and almost as soon as his eyes opened he began to speak. He tried to lift himself, but his rescuer gently restrained him.

"You lie still, Joe, that's your business, and I'm here to see that you do it."

"Mebbe, but my business, stranger, is over there; an' while I'm able to crook a finger an' pump lead nary one's goin' to hold me back," declared the indomitable frontiersman.

"That's all right," Heweitt tried to soothe him. "You'll know me—Steve Heweitt. I called at your shack and your wife's told me how you're fixed. It was your job all right until you got knocked out, now it's mine. I told her I'd try to get you an' Billy——"

"Hold on there, pard," interrupted the wounded man vigorously. "Don't you worry none about me, it's the kid comes first. Guess a woman like my Susie can get hold of a man most any time she sets out to find him, but another Billy ain't to be raised nohow. She's never had but the one—waited until she was nigh sick with waitin' before he did come. I'm O.K.; I can look after myself. You get a wiggle on for Billy."

"All right, Joe. And where is Billy?"

Lifting himself, Hibbert pointed with a bloody hand. "Over there's the shack, and Billy's in it. The swine showed him to me himself a while back. Told me that unless that hoss, which ain't his, is back inside his corral by sun-up to-morrow, the kid's a gone coon. Means it too, the devil! That's when I cut loose at him, and he did some shootin', and here I am. Pard, you get out our Billy, and if you can't do it on yer own, and 'll raise a shout, if hell freezes solid I'll skate across to lend ye a hand. Guess I ain't played out just yet."

No conventional words of gratitude—mighty little that even sounded like thanks, but Heweitt, gripping the shaking hand held out to him, realized with a certainty that no fine phrases could have strengthened the fervency of this rough-tongued pioneer's thankfulness.

"Keep quiet here, Joe. I'll call you if it's necessary," he promised.

Within a few minutes he had located the unseen ranch-house, though no light was visible from the shuttered windows. Finding the door, he hammered with his fist.

"Goom in, goom in, Yoe Hibberd; der door ain'd locked for such as you," boomed a deep, thick voice in which was an underlying note of sarcasm. "Goom in. I ben waiting for you."

And Heweitt accepted the invitation, though doubtful as to the manner of his reception.

Shoving the door back and alert for a quick drop backward, he shouted through the widening crack, "I'm not Hibbert," though by no means assured the information would delay the expected bullet.

On the threshold he stopped, facing a six-shooter in the hand of a stout middle-aged man of pronouncedly Slavonic features, black-eyed, with skin bloodless beneath its tan, and a black, square beard. The man was dressed in dirty blue overalls and high boots, and the grim expression in his beady eyes swiftly altered to a blank surprise as he failed to recognize his visitor.

"Who in Henker was you?" he demanded after a moment's staring.

"Thought I was someone else, eh?" asked Heweitt pleasantly.

But his easy, confident bearing was much at variance with his feelings. Kacheff's invitation to his presumed enemy to enter indicated the man did not lack

courage, and he seemed the kind of man liable to shoot upon suspicion.

"Poot up der hands, kervick," he commanded sharply.

Heweitt's expression of nervous surprise was really well done. He was wishing himself a whole lot absent, but made no immediate effort of obedience.

"Poot up der hands," ordered the rancher again.

"Who in Henker was you an' what you want here?"

Heweitt made a slow movement forward. It was a big room, furnished with no more than the barest necessities, dirty and unkempt; a big fire—there was no other light—blazed at one end.

"I'll put them up if it's any pleasure to you," replied the outlaw, slowly elevating his arms. "But I must say this is an odd sort of welcome for a stranger."

He went closer—he wanted to get a good deal closer—but Kacheff stopped him with a significant movement of his weapon.

"Stand where you was," he ordered. "Who was you? I don'd know you. Where you come from an' what you want?"

"To sit down, first thing, if you don't mind. I've done a hard day's riding," explained the outlaw. "Then a talk with you."

He was talking simply to gain time, having no scheme on hand for the removal by force or guile of Billy from the kidnapper's house. Of the presence of the child he could see no sign. But he could see that the ranch owner was as full of suspicion as a mule is of cussedness, and he was not desiring to figure as a target for any fancy shooting unless there was some reasonable advantage to offset the hazard. Still, if Billy were in the house the promise to rescue him had to be redeemed somehow.

On the other hand, Kacheff was irresolute as well as

suspicious. Confidently anticipating his enemy, he found himself confronted by a total stranger.

"You was send by that man Hibberd?" he asserted, still holding the intruder covered.

"Hibbert! No, I was not sent by him. What made you think that?" prevaricated Heweitt. "I came——"

A sudden, narrowing of Kacheff's yellow lids, a tightening of his full red lips caused him to realize that he had made a slip.

"Who is Hibbert, anyway?" he said quickly, but the other interrupted.

"Don'd you move an inch or I shood," he snapped warningly. "So you was knowing Yoe Hibberd, eh, Misder Sdranger, was you? You know he was lying oudside with my bullet in him because he try to shood me! Ach! so you was lying when you say you come here to talk with me an' noding more! You come here to do what Yoe Hibberd cannot do by himself for all his big dalk. You try to kill me, eh? But you make von big mistake, mein friend, for it was me that will kill you."

"Then try and be damned to you!" shouted Heweitt violently, throwing off the mask. "But you're wrong, it was Joe Hibbert's wife sent me up here to get you. I promised her I'd get away from you her child you'd been coward enough to steal, and I mean keeping my word."

"It loogs lige it, sure," retorted Kacheff jeeringly. "Him oudside thought he ged the kid, too, but he ain'd. Didn' ged no nearer than where he lie with my bullet in him. You have got here und it was no better of you than of him. The kid stays here all right—alive just so long as I choose, if mine horse back to me have not come."

"You daren't kill the child," cried Heweitt hotly. Kacheff laughed brutally. "Who prevents me?" he asked.

"The Law." Heweitt was too mad to recognize the irony of one such as himself expressing confidence in that restraint. "And if you do hurt the child the Law will see to it that you are hanged."

Again the Russian laughed. "You talk of the Law, bud you don'd bluff me, Misder Sdranger."

"No one tries to bluff wild beasts or vermin. One shoots them on sight, or stamps them under foot. Oh! you infernal hound, to strike at a man through his wife and child! You can only fight babies. A man has you scared to death. Why, you didn't dare to go up to the house until you knew that the kid was by himself—that even its mother wasn't there to protect it. If you'd seen the woman, you'd 've turned tail and fled——"

"That will do," interrupted Kacheff threateningly, his voice thick with passion.

The outlaw's gibes had taken him on the raw. His little bloodshot eyes menaced murder, and his wide chest heaved with the violence of the anger stimulated by Heweitt's contemptuous invectives.

It seemed a fool's trick to aggravate the man still further, whatever gratification of the feelings it might be; but in spite of the warning Heweitt persisted, flinging taunt and insult until the big man's brittle patience gave way.

"By the Cross!" he spluttered, almost incoherent in his rage, "bud that was enough. Und now I shood you, you—you——"

The muzzle of his revolver covering the outlaw's forehead, he strode nearer until barely three feet separated them.

"I shood you like a dog, Misder Sdranger," he snarled. "But before, you beg mine pardon for what you say of me. On your knees, you dog!"

He meant it, and Heweitt was within seconds of the death he had brought upon himself. But fascinating

as was that menacing circlet of steel, his eyes went beyond it to rest upon those of Kacheff. Hard and straight they fixed their gaze upon the shrunken pupils of the gunholder.

So the two men stood—and waited. The outlaw seemed still as if cut out of stone, but he was feeling a queer, crawling sensation over his skin; nerve and muscle were tingling and quivering with suppressed excitement. Every fibre in his being tense, every fraction of will power concentrated, he stood in dumb challenge of his enemy to carry out the threat he had made.

That for which he waited came at last—not the sudden jetting of a flame, but a momentary movement by Kacheff, no more than a mere flickering of the man's eyelids.

It was something little enough, but sufficient to tell the outlaw that Kacheff had missed his chance—lost it because he could not forego the enjoyment of his triumph, of holding his enemy at his mercy.

Heweitt saw his chance, and took it.

Even as Kacheff's eyelashes moved he struck upward at his wrist, bent his own knees, and leaped in to grapple. The revolver exploded, and the outlaw's hat, perforated by a bullet, was lifted from his head. Then the men were chest to chest and wrestling desperately.

Heweitt's left hand clutched at the other's wrist and gave a violent outward twist. A spasm of acute pain shot through the limb and the weapon clattered on the floor. With a snarl of rage, the Russian wrenched his arm free and struck at his antagonist's face. He was the heavier, possibly the more powerful man, though Heweitt's muscles were of chilled steel and he was the more active. The advantage of surprise was also with him. With head driving in under the Russian's chin, arm across the small of his back, he strove to force

him over backwards. But the man was much too solid.

With stamping feet they reeled about the room, crashing into the scanty furniture and overturning it. Once, they all but fell together upon the fire. Grunting with every effort, Kacheff thudded heavy blows upon the outlaw's head. He kicked viciously whenever a chance presented itself. But Heweitt, having mended his grip, was not to be beaten out of it. With a leg stroke he tripped his man, hurling him back, but collision with the solid wall of the house saved a fall.

Reeling sideways, they stumbled against a fallen chair, fell, and rolled over and over.

Now was the chance for the Russian's extra weight to tell. He came uppermost, panting noisily, reared himself up and tried to set his knee upon the outlaw's chest. But his balance was insecure. With a drive from his knee Heweitt unsettled him, gave an eel-like wriggle, rolled clear, and bounded to his feet.

With glaring eyes the men faced each other for a moment before getting to close grips again. The bigger man, realizing his wind was going, was first to move. As he came forward a sharp report sounded, and almost simultaneously Kacheff yelled shrilly, clapping his left hand to the other arm. Heweitt had not forgotten he was armed, and in the instant of respite had slipped his revolver from its holster and fired from the hip.

Cursing in his native tongue, Kacheff staggered back, his right arm broken.

"Now it's my turn to do the talking," panted Heweitt. "You'll do the listening, and, in addition, you'll do as you're told—do it quickly too, unless you want to die quick. D'you hear, you swine? The game's mine, and it's for you to pay up. I'm here for the child of Joe Hibbert that you stole. I'm not

staying here, and when I go that kid goes along with me."

"Der kid was nod here," stammered Kacheff.

"You're a liar. The child is here. You showed him to his father. Joe told me. Bring him here—now, at once, and the Lord have mercy on you if you've done him any harm. If anything's happened to that child, so surely as I stand here I'll put a bullet through you and finish you. You understand what I say? And if you think I won't be as good as my word, don't you forget it that my name's Steve Heweitt, and it belongs to a man who keeps his word, and doesn't care a curse what happens to him after."

Kacheff had heard the name of Steve Heweitt, and the effect of meeting its owner in the flesh was told by the sudden dilation of his eyes, the dropping of his jaw. The expression of sullen hate faded from his face and he became abject.

In a whining voice he hurried out that the child had come to no harm and should be produced immediately.

"Und I will no tage him again," he added.

"You can depend upon his father to see to that," Heweitt answered grimly. He added that it would be unhealthy for his listener if he had any intentions of acting treacherously.

Eagerly Kacheff denied any of such intentions. Not only was he beaten, but he knew it.

"I gif op," he repeated more than once.

"The better for you. Now where's the child?"

Kacheff indicated a door giving admittance to an inner room.

"In there. I open the door und you see," he said.

"You'll keep in front of me all the time and go into the room first," Heweitt assured him. "And you'll find a light, so that I can see what I'm looking at."

Kacheff found and lighted a candle. He unlocked

and threw open the inner door, revealing a small boy lying on the floor on a blanket, so soundly asleep that all the clatter of the fierce struggle in the outer room had not disturbed him.

"There he was, so safe und sound as gan be," whimpered the Russian, one shaking hand pointing at the round, dirty, and tear-stained face pillowed on a bent arm.

"The better for you."

And then Heweitt suddenly froze stiff, acutely alert, his head on one side as though listening intently. Kacheff stared at him wonderingly.

It was the sound of mounted horses approaching the ranch at a walk that had caught the outlaw's ears. And Kacheff, too, heard. A pale light slipped into his eyes, and he glanced covertly at his companion. With a quick movement Heweitt was beside him.

"Mounted Police, I reckon," he whispered impressively, his face thrust close to the other's.

"Ach!"

"They are coming to the door. You will open to them. Maybe they're wanting Steve Heweitt, and perhaps they will ask you if you have seen him pass this way. You understand?"

All this in a whisper, his breath stirring Kacheff's beard, while the fingers of his free hand bit deeply into the flesh of the man's arm. Kacheff was gently urged towards the doorway. His face was stupid, but he made no attempt to meet the outlaw's eyes. Heweitt jolted him as he put the question, and the man nodded.

"Und what was I do say?" he got out.

"Say what you please, but——" The grip tightened upon the wincing limb, and from the lifted muzzle of the speaker's gun the Russian shrank back. "But if you tell them I'm in here—utter a single word to make them suspect—do anything to keep them, and

my first bullet goes through your brain, by God it does, and don't you forget it."

"Bud—bud they see you themselves," stammered Kacheff.

"Not if I stay in this room. Now get on. Take the light with you. Here!"

Cat-footed, Heweitt darted outside, snatched Kacheff's coat from the nail where it hung, and forced the man into it. The tell-tale stain of blood on the shirt-sleeve would surely catch the alert eyes of the police, and the mental condition of the wounded man suggested no plausible explanation when it was demanded.

"Get that furniture straightened out. Quick!" commanded Heweitt, shoving him forward. "And the Lord help you if you as much as think of giving me away. A gun will be covering you all the time."

Kacheff, trembling with fear, blundered into the outer room. Leaving the inner door sufficiently open to allow him to command the outer entrance, Heweitt dropped behind the piled collection of potato-sacks and packing-cases, barrels and other old junk with which the room was stored. He had little faith in Kacheff's wits and small hope of escape, but he meant fighting. He had ten shots without reloading—having annexed Kacheff's gun—and the police were not going to handle the reward without having earned it. He wondered if they had happened on Joe Hibbert, or the black horse.

In a few seconds there sounded from outside the jingle of bits, the stamping of horses brought to a standstill. Then Heweitt saw the house door unceremoniously thrown open, and two men in dusty police uniform step quickly inside. The first stayed at the entrance; the second, going direct to Kacheff, who was staring at the intruders with an expression

of blended fear and stupidity, in picturesquely vivid language wanted to know if the ranch owner were dead or simply soaking his head.

"No, I was nod dead," began the Russian haltingly. "I——"

"Not so much lip!" interrupted the constable, a good-looking youngster with impudent blue eyes. "Wake up, Dutchy, and open your ears. Had any visitors here to-night—friends come an' give you a call, eh?"

"Eh? There was——"

"Sweetheart been up to see you, eh? Look as if you dealt in that line. What you been doing?" The constable glanced round. "Having a clear up? Looks like it needed it. Smells like a pigstye. Any-one been here to see you, I said. Don't wait to think it out. Hand out the facts. Who's been visiting you?"

"There was—was no one."

"Not, eh? Well, don't look so dam' scared because you're seeing a uniform. You ain't going to be eaten. Have you seen——"

"I haf seen nod no one" interrupted Kacheff hurriedly.

"Don't be so certain. Jog your memory, Dutchy," advised the policeman. "Sure you haven't seen a fellow——"

He ran off a fairly creditable word picture of the outlaw in the inner room, whose right hand was steady enough for the muzzle of his gun not to shift by the fraction of an inch from the selected spot behind Kacheff's left ear.

Kacheff shook his head. "I nod seen him. Who was he?"

"You're sure? Come now, think." The light easy tone suddenly became hard and official. "We're after Steve Hewett, the outlaw. Came across a dead

horse on the trail below, and it might be this Heweitt's. If you're harbouring——"

"I haf seen no one," reiterated Kacheff with sudden resolution. "There was none bud myselluf in the house—all bud a liddle kid," he corrected himself hastily. "He was sleepin'."

"Kid! What business you with kids in your house?" demanded the constable, and the man by the door said something that Heweitt could not catch. There was a laugh. "Pretty tough kind of a kid, Heweitt." Both policemen again laughed. "Well, Dutchy, show us this kid of yours. Don't take after his father, I hope."

Kacheff mumbled something, making a quarter-turn of his head to the inside room. Then he jerked out:

"The kid was asleep."

"Better take a look, Donovan," advised the man in the doorway. "The man looks a fool, but there's never any telling. I don't reckon Heweitt's here. That horse wasn't like the one he was riding, and we don't know he's come this way at all. But we may as well make certain."

"I show you," volunteered Kacheff.

"Don't you worry, Dutchy, we're plumb used to nurseries," the constable named Donovan told him. "Give me that candle."

With his six-shooter handy, Donovan walked softly to the door and pushed it wide open. The candle-light revealed the still sleeping child, and with a casual glance around the room the constable stepped back.

"Only the kid," he reported to his comrade.

And then both men fell to cursing softly, cursing the man who had contrived to slip through their fingers.

"If you see this Heweitt," one of them told

Kacheff as they went out, "don't you forget there's a thousand dollars for the man who gets him, and that it's the penitentiary for failing to give information that'll lead to his arrest. So long, Dutchy. You can go to sleep again."

Their hoof-beats died away into the silence of the night and Kacheff, after staring vacantly into the darkness, turned with a sigh to find his uninvited guest standing behind him.

"Guess it's safest not to, my friend," observed Heweitt softly. "A thousand dollars aren't much use to a man when he's dead. But to save you the trouble of making a fool of yourself, I'll tie you up before I get away. It's a pity to wake the kid, but I've to get him back to his mother before morning. Then I'll come back and attend to you. That arm of yours needs looking at."

There was no sign of Joe Hibbert when Heweitt, carrying Billy, got back to where he had left the wounded man, but his second whistle was answered by a call from a thicket a hundred yards away to which Joe had dragged himself. There, too, he found his horse, which Hibbert had contrived to lead along with him.

"The boy's here, Joe," said Heweitt as he joined him.

"I didn't reckon as you'd come away without him," returned the frontiersman. "Has that swine——"

"Sound as a bell, Joe, but he's the last word for sleeping. Kacheff's found a broken arm."

"I heard the shootin'. Heard, too, the horsemen go by, and I allowed as they might be the police. But I knew it was all right, Steve," the rough fellow said simply. "I allowed as God wouldn't let you come to no harm, seein' the errand you was on. And I couldn't see Susie's prayers bein' wasted neither. That kid's most all there is on earth to her an' me,

an' we ain't had such a hell of a lot o' luck up to now, though I am no ways grumblin'! Partner, we ain't likely to fergit what you done for us both, and if ever——"

"If ever we're going to get back to your wife before daylight, it's time we got a move on," interrupted Heweitt hastily. "Think you can hold on if I give you a hoist into the saddle?"

"Ought, pard. I ain't done much up to now," said Hibbert. "We'll try."

He did try and he succeeded, though with what agony to his wounded limb only himself knew.

For Heweitt, too, that journey back to the shack was an ordeal. With Billy, still sleeping, on his arm, and leading the now chastened black horse at a walking pace, there were times when he thought the miles would never end. But it was a worse ordeal that awaited him at the cabin, and from Mrs. Hibbert's gratitude he fairly turned his back and fled—on the black horse, which both husband and wife insisted should stay with him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE REMITTANCE MAN

FOR two days Heweitt remained at Kacheff's ranch, accurately calculating no further official visitation. His involuntary host was a dull man, and the circumstances induced no unusual lightness of spirits or conversation.

When Heweitt left it was for a hiding-place in the Knee Hills. There for three weeks he lay up, venturing from his retreat but seldom, being mighty careful as to the building of fires, eating and drinking sparingly, and acquiring a condition of mind irritable and dangerous.

After three weeks of his own undiluted company, Steve Heweitt found himself no longer able to bear the seclusion. The blue devils grabbed him and refused to break hold. So he threw the saddle on the black horse and rode down into the village of Lone Pine and found Carney's saloon.

There he sat, back against the wall and legs outstretched, with glowering eyes and surly mouth. He was not quarrelsome, for he was dumb as though tongueless; but he looked dangerous. The others in the saloon, for the most part instructed in the signs of a brittle temper, glanced at him covertly now and again, but otherwise left him to himself. If it were his idea of pleasure to sit in a saloon, drinking little and saying less, the large Western tolerance opined that he had every right to amuse himself thus.

But his black brows were not permitted to interfere with the enjoyment of others. There was whisky, conversation, and laughter without stint; and the mainspring of the same was a tall, well-set-up, well dressed young man with good features and a fair moustache who contrived to occupy the better part of the foreground of the picture.

Steve Hewett, preoccupied though he seemed and listless, was watching that young man, and his private feelings were undilutedly hostile.

He was a young man of manifestly a higher station in life than the regular foregatherers of the saloon, the chance cow-men, freighters, and what not who contributed the irregular custom. From where he originally hailed, no one with any experience of western Canada would have had the least difficulty in deciding. From nowhere but England could have come a man who so pleasingly combined positive assurance of his own superiority with encouraging condescension towards the rest of the earth.

"Boys, step around. It's free liquor to-day and my shout," was the gist of his conversation.

The bartender, a toughly built fellow with a white shirt open at the throat and no collar about his thick neck, judiciously abetted him.

"Mr. Grantley, your glass ain't nothin' inside," he would remark, just as often as seemed convenient.

And then Mr. Grantley would retort: "The deuce it hasn't! And what do you suppose you're here for, eh?"

Whereat the bartender would smile, most of the loungers laugh appreciatively at the witticism and step up again, nodding, and saying most politely: "Here's how!" The young man, well used to such popularity and recognizing it as no more than his due, would nod back carelessly and empty his own glass.

The only reason why Steve Heweitt was not periodically included in this brief trafficking, was that the founder of the feast believed him asleep.

He was not asleep. He was very wide awake, and every hour increased his disgust and indignation. What he wanted to do was to get up, grab that very foolish young man by the back of the neck, and hurt him.

In half a hundred localities had Heweitt met the remittance man, and he hated the breed most fervently. Superior, but able to be affable when he chooses, generous to folly when his money has come to hand, a polite cadger when it has been spent; with a lofty scorn of all manner of work, and ignorant of all persistence of effort; dangerous to himself and useless to others; such is the average remittance man.

Watching Grantley, a well-nourished specimen of the breed, Heweitt felt wrath steadily growing within him.

Suddenly the outlaw made a movement and sat up. Grantley, looking around, had a view of the effort, and came across the saloon towards him with a long, swinging stride. By his clothes—puffed riding breeches, leggings and sporting jacket—even more than by his face was his nationality made evident. He was clean, smart, newly shaved, well-groomed, well-bred—and just waste.

"From the old country, sir?" he suggested politely.

"Sorry to say I am," Heweitt returned with viciousness.

"Indeed! But don't regret it, sir. I'm from there, too. Will you give me the pleasure of having a drink with me? If you'll kindly name your particular poison."

Heweitt eyed him grimly, disapproval writ plain. Not only were this young man and himself from the same country, but both belonged to the same class,

and for this reason was his aversion the more bitter.

"If you'd drink the poison I named, I'd order it with the greatest pleasure," he said distinctly, looking the young man squarely in the eyes.

The remittance man looked puzzled. Smiling, he shook his head.

"Afraid that's a bit above me," he said airily.

"But what will you take? Jim has quite a decent assortment." He stepped back a pace and looked Heweitt over from head to foot with an insolent stare.

"Look rather—you'll excuse my saying so, old chap—as though a drink'd liven you up. Bit below par, ain't you?"

There was an insolent amusement in the drawling voice, trying to a man whose temper happens to be sick, and it acted upon the flame of Heweitt's hatred of the Grantley breed as a dash of kerosene does upon a brisk fire. For the moment the self-control that held the outlaw's feelings in check weakened.

"Oh go to the devil, and stay there!" he snapped. "Though you'll do that all right without my bidding."

The outburst seemed to amuse Grantley.

"The gentleman's liver appears to be out of order," he observed lightly, turning from Heweitt to the bar loungers, who in their hearts sneered at the folly of the remittance man the while they profited by it.

They had exhibited a mild interest in Grantley's passage at arms; they grinned at his last remark. But one, more observant or more kindly disposed than the rest, drew near the young man and whispered confidentially—

"Wouldn't fool with that fellow if I was you. Dunno who he is, but he looks a hard citizen."

"Looks like a disagreeable devil," rejoined Grantley, without taking the trouble to lower his voice overmuch. "Set 'em up again, Jim."

"Sure, cap," grinned the fellow.

But when, bottles in hand, he turned again to the bar, he almost brought his ugly face into collision with the head of Heweitt.

The latter was leaning across the bar, and the expression in his eyes was hard. A big impulse had come to him, and he acted upon it without taking time to think.

"Guess you needn't trouble, Jim, to pour out any more drinks to that order," he said.

Carney, for once in his life genuinely surprised out of his composure, paused, staring open-eyed at the interrupter. Then his black brows came down, and he tersely inquired what in the name of hell *he* was butting in for.

"Because I reckon this young fool has already wasted more money with you than is good for him," returned Heweitt.

His red face suddenly blazing, Carney turned to where stood the remittance man.

"Hi, cap; here's a guy here says as I ain't to let yer have no more whisky," he shouted. "Is he yer new nurse, hey?"

Grantley turned without haste, and his insolent eyes found Heweitt's face. Heweitt returned the stare calmly. He was fully expecting an explosion, although the remittance man was certainly not drunk. "Mighty near sober" would have been the definition of the indulgent West. But the moderate excitement of his carouse, barely well started, died away from the young man altogether as he continued to eye the self-appointed censor of his conduct and morals. He was not angry—merely amused. There was the beginning of a smile about his well-cut lips that were not yet showing the looseness of the confirmed drinker.

So for some seconds he stared, the saloon became

quiet as a graveyard, onlookers with their eyes glued to one or other of the principal actors. It was Carney's hoarse voice that broke the stillness.

"Say, cap; does what he says go?" he cried, with a backward jerk of his head towards Heweitt. And there was a sneer stronger than most men would stomach in the question.

Grantley might have been five thousand miles away for all the attention he gave. His interest was in Heweitt, whom he was considering thoughtfully. The saloon keeper repeated his query, and the young man glanced at him sideways for about the twentieth part of a second.

"Don't make such an infernal row, Jim," he admonished.

The tone was just that in which a man interested in something else would speak to a too obtrusive dog. It got through even Carney's tough hide, and his unshaven face grew almost black. His eyes gleamed evilly, and he muttered something wholly uncomplimentary, but Grantley ignored him. Very deliberately he crossed the eight feet or so separating him from Heweitt.

"May I inquire, sir, whether your remark to the bartender had reference to me?" he asked in that polite, well controlled, dangerously suave tone of the well born young Englishman with whom an inferior has presumed to take a liberty.

"I certainly told the man not to give you any more whisky," replied Heweitt, promptly and with equal courtesy.

"And the reason for taking the liberty?" queried the remittance man, still profoundly polite.

"Because it is apparent you have already had more than is good for you," answered Heweitt coolly. "I don't mind adding that you are a fool, and this man is rogue enough to take advantage of your folly. Since

it is evident that you don't realize when you are making a fool of yourself, any other man is doing you a kindness by informing you."

He was spoiling for a fight; nothing else would relieve him of the moodiness and ill-humour that had him in close grip.

The eyes of the remittance man grew a trifle harder, his colour faded slightly, and his voice, though still more courteous as to tone, dropped to the zero point of chilliness.

"Do you realize, my friend, that you are most infernally impertinent?" he asked.

Heweitt meant seeing this matter through, not only for the good it was going to do himself, but because he had concluded this Grantley was rather too good a man to go all the way to the bad without a hand being lifted to check him. He hated the man's folly, but he rather liked the look in his eyes now that he was roused. He approved of the closely set lips, also the pronounced jaw beneath. And he concluded that, for once, he would risk being officious in a good cause, though having no natural love for the "well meaning friend."

"I do," he answered. "And I've taken the risk. It is rather unwise, I will admit."

"I'm delighted to hear you admit it," rejoined Grantley.

He turned about to the bar.

"Carney, you'll fill up my glass again," he said deliberately. "The others too. Gentlemen, I want you to join me in a toast."

"Why sure, cap," said Carney, getting briskly to work.

The loungers, much amused, looked towards their host. And he, glass in hand, looked round, nodded genially, moved a pace nearer Heweitt, and looked him squarely in the eyes, smiling.

"To the devil with all amateur sky-pilots," he said loudly, and drank.

"You poor fool!" Heweitt said in a pitying voice.

"Again, Jim," and Grantley pushed his tumbler forward.

"Sure, cap"—with a grin at Heweitt.

And then, quick as lightning flash, Heweitt pulled his gun and the tinkle of falling splintered glass mingled with the sharp report and Carney's bull-throated shout of anger. Through the tiny cloud of blue smoke the shooter saw the face of the remittance man undergo an ugly change.

The next instant Grantley had leaped at Heweitt, striking at his face with straight-shooting fists. That the other man had a gun in his hand the young Englishman did not seem to take into account.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DEVIL A PREACHER

IN the West, the man who has a name as a skilful fist fighter enjoys a reputation wholly out of proportion to his capacity for doing real damage.

Such a reputation Heweitt had enjoyed amongst his fellows of the Lazy H outfit and in a few other places. Although Grantley's onslaught came with little warning, he was not entirely unprepared. The gun in his hand was shoved back into its holster, and his pistol hand, following quick upon the blow that his left arm had guarded, met the remittance man with swift accuracy in a counter that arrived exactly at the spot where a blow will produce the scientific "knock-out." Grantley's head snapped back, his feet missed the floor, and he went down on his back with a crash. There he stayed, very still, his eyes closed.

"Any remarks?" queried Heweitt, looking from the saloon keeper around among the rest.

None came. With astonishing unanimity the beneficiaries of Grantley's frequent generosity elected to be severely silent. Not one found the spunk to offer the slightest form of protest. Suddenly realizing they had neglected their affairs outside the saloon for long enough, they unobtrusively departed.

Only Carney, whose business was on the spot, remained. With a gloomily respectful eye he viewed the outlaw and answered up promptly as required.

"I suppose Mr. Grantley owns a horse. Where is it," demanded Heweitt crisply.

"It's an iron grey, and at the hitchin' bar—least-ways, was," Carney informed him.

He added, in effect, that he would not be unduly grieved by the early departure of his remaining customer.

"Neither shall I," admitted Heweitt cheerfully. "The mixture of sharps, curs, and foul air is somewhat depressing. And this fellow"—he indicated Grantley—"where does he live?"

"Right here. Boards with me," growled the saloon-keeper.

Heweitt whistled significantly. "You don't do your work by halves, sure," he commented. "Well, you needn't expect your boarder in to dinner."

Carney opened his eyes at this information and scowled unpleasantly; but he provided no obstacle when Heweitt, who was feeling less down-hearted than had been the case an hour earlier, picked up the remittance man's limp body and carried it outside.

With some difficulty, for Grantley was a well-made man, Heweitt hoisted him across the high saddle of the iron grey; tied him on, and mounted his own horse. Leading the other, he started at a quick walk through the town and out up to the open country.

When a suitable spot had been reached, he intended trying an experiment.

The walk became a lope, and the motion, combined with sharp passage through the brisk air, quickly revived Grantley. But he said nothing. Conversation does not appeal strongly to a man who is hanging with head on one side of his mount, while his legs dangle against the other. He kept quiet physically, because he could not do otherwise. But he was feeling madder than a wet hen long before Heweitt, having discovered the suitable spot, pulled up, untied the

fastenings that had held Grantley on the saddle, and helped him to his feet.

"Reckon you'll have gathered some dust coming along?" observed the outlaw coolly. "Well, there's water yonder for a drink, and I would recommend a dip also. The creek's plenty deep enough."

The remittance man said nothing, but the glance he gave his captor was expressive. Turning on his heel he walked down to the creek. It was no use pretending he did not want a drink. The combination of whisky and horse-jolting had deranged his stomach, and he stood in real need of refreshment.

More than anything else though, he wanted to slay Heweitt.

The spot Heweitt had chosen was a clearing within the poplars fringing the banks of a small-sized stream, in a shallow valley through which it passed to its farther wanderings amid a chain of low wooded hills. It was a spot of sylvan peacefulness and delight in a location as yet untouched by the settler. The sky was blue enough and the sun was shining warmly, but the paling tints of atmosphere and sunlight, no less than the dulling yellow of the rankly abundant grass, told of the progress of the fall. The timber tints were likewise undergoing change—had changed already with some species; and the passing of a cool, fresh breeze among the painted leaves produced a sound different from that which accompanies the singing of the wind amid the green and more sappy foliage of spring and summer.

A soberness had overtaken the wild, as with a woman who has passed beyond the summer of life. Nature, still beautiful, showed herself more subdued. With a growing sedateness the land contentedly awaited the coming of winter.

But human blood can run as hotly and quickly at Michaelmas as at Midsummer; and although he con-

trolled his walk so as to keep his excitement from becoming apparent, sedateness was far removed from Rupert Grantley's spirit as he returned from the dip in the creek. Hewitt was busy about the fire he had built, and a pleasing aroma floated upon the air.

He heard the young man's step, but did not look up.

"Feeling better?" he inquired cheerfully.

Grantley, arms stiff, fists clenched, looked down at him from a very erect position.

"Stand up!" he ordered peremptorily.

"Wait a bit. I don't want these flapjacks to burn. Grub'll be ready in a couple of minutes."

"Stand up," repeated Grantley. "Stand up and give me the opportunity to do what I mean doing before I leave here."

"Leaving! but you aren't leaving yet. There are one or two things to be done first, and grub's the earliest of them, sit down. Talking on an empty stomach's——"

"Damn grub! Get up, I say, or——"

The young man's temper was at the full limit of its tether. The dip in the creek had failed to cool it. He was so possessed with rage and mortification that a big effort was necessary to command his tongue to coherent use. He wanted to feel his fists battering upon the face of this man who had most damnably and unwarrantably interfered with him, had humiliated him, not only in the sight of others but in his own eyes. Grantley knew well enough that he had acted like a fool, but this was no excuse for the other man's behaviour. But for the natural instinct of his kind, he would have struck down his enemy as he was.

"Get up and take the thrashing I'm going to give you," he cried thickly, finger nails digging little pits in his palms.

"What I'm going to do is to have grub," rejoined

Heweitt equably. "And you'll join me I hope. There is ample for two."

"Are---you---going---to---fight?" Grantley all but choked.

"I'm going to eat, I tell you. If you're sensible, you'll do the same."

The remittance man gasped impotently. Was the man afraid and trying to avoid a fight? Yet he had never met with a coward so completely master of his emotions as this man.

He made another effort. Stooping, he slapped the back of his hand across Heweitt's ear.

"Doesn't that tempt you?" he sneered.

"I shall certainly have something to say about it, but not until I'm through eating," Heweitt returned, glancing up at him.

And falling into the cowpuncher's usual squatting seat, he took his knife, sliced a portion from the chunk of caribou meat that was roasting, and began to eat with relish, oblivious of the glowering person above him.

Grantley started off suddenly, walked as far as the water, and came back. He found a seat some ten feet distant.

"You're not going to get out of it, my friend, if I have to stay here all night," he said grimly; and, to while away the time, produced a silver cigarette case and began to smoke.

"Just as you like."

Ten minutes passed.

"You'll feel better if you have something to eat," tempted Heweitt.

Grantley ignored him. With ostentatious repudiation of the outlaw's presence he continued to smoke. He made no movement when Heweitt, digging out an ancient pipe, filled it and puffed lazily. He was trying to invent something equal to the occasion,

but there did not appear to be any words adequate.

"You are waiting here with the intention of fighting me. Why?" said Heweitt suddenly. "What do you want to fight me for?"

The question was simple enough; so was the answer, but it was of the simple variety so exceedingly difficult to put into plain words. Rupert Grantley knew well enough, and yet he hesitated. To declare that his reason was the soothing of his wounded pride would be true, but it certainly was not easy.

Heweitt chipped in again.

"Come to think of it," he said meditatively; "I don't know that I'm altogether keen on doing any fighting with a coward."

This was too much. Grantley sprang to his feet, eyes and cheeks flaming.

"A coward" he shouted. "By George! but you're going too far."

"A coward who is also a thief," continued Heweitt quietly, meeting the other's furious eyes with unconcern.

"A——. Oh for the love of Heaven, get up and fight like a man before I forget myself altogether," shouted the young Englishman passionately.

"So the truth hurts, eh? I thought it might."

Heweitt suddenly stood bolt upright. Taking the pipe from his lips, he pointed at the young man.

"A coward, I said, and I meant it. It's true, by Jove, it is!" he cried. "No one's ever told you before, more's the pity. Isn't the man a coward who, with youth and health and strength, refuses to work, but prefers to be a dependent upon the bounty or charity of others? Whether it's his father's, or another's doesn't matter a straw. What else is he? Tell me if you know. I'd be glad to learn. Isn't he a coward who shrinks from all the responsibilities of life? What is the slave of liquor but a coward, eh? Thief, too,

I said; he is a thief who takes what isn't his. It doesn't matter a tinker's curse whether your father is or is not in a position to pay you the sum that stands between you and destitution. You're so sunken in your shame, so content with it, that you don't care. The rest of humanity may go to the devil so long as you can get what you want.

"Fight! I set myself up on no pedestal, but I'd be soiling my hands to fight with such as you. Oh, you remittance men! you make me tired and ashamed. I was a fool ever to have interfered with you. I ought to have allowed you to go on drinking; for the more you drink the quicker you'll be dead. I was a fool, supposing it was any good wanting to make a real man out of a coward, trying to turn a thief into an honest man, hoping to get a hog to forsake the filth in which it loves to wallow. I beg your pardon."

Beneath the lash of Heweitt's bitter, scornful tongue Rupert Grantley's face became red, then white, then livid. The devil looked nakedly out from his eyes, and ten times was he on the point of rushing upon his accuser and striking him down. The will was there, but a tardily awakened conscience hampered it. Much of what this tanned and bearded man with the hard set mouth and watchful, haunted eyes had said of him was true; he needed no reminding; and the truth hurts.

In spite of his passion, he could not meet Heweitt's direct, accusing gaze. He felt shamed. But wounded pride came to his assistance, and prompted so successfully that conscience was forced into a back seat. He was humbled, but felt no humility; and his anger against the man who had lowered his self opinion abated nothing. In Grantley was a streak of that perversity by force of which a man is held to a course of action against which every part of his better nature and reason is opposed.

"And what the devil business is it of yours?" he growled sullenly.

"None."

"And who may you be that you imagine you've any right to take me to task?"

"If you mean what is my name, it's Heweitt."

"Steve Heweitt, by any chance? The fellow for whom the police are offering a reward?" went on Grantley, without any great show of surprise.

"That is the man."

And at this admission Grantley laughed aloud.

"A high-minded outlaw, by Jove!" he sneered.

"Satan reproving sin, eh? As a censor of morals, Mr. Steve Heweitt, you are to be congratulated. Why you infernal hypocrite——"

"Don't waste your breath," interrupted Heweitt.

"You'll be likely to want it all, I fancy, I have changed my mind. You wanted me to fight. Very well, I am going to fight you; and may the Lord help me to hammer shame into you."

"Now you're talking," said Grantley; and his face became downright cheerful-looking.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIGHT BY THE CREEK

PRELIMINARIES were simple and briefly despatched. Coats were removed and pitched on the ground; sleeves were rolled up and Heweitt drew in his belt a couple of holes.

"No need to shake hands, I think," suggested Grantley.

Heweitt agreed.

The remittance man had the advantage of superior height and reach, but in the matter of weight there was little to choose between them. Heweitt, however, was in the better condition. It was a healthy, if harassing life he had been leading, with but scant opportunity for the accumulation of superfluous tissue. Moreover, he was fighting under the dominance of a fixed intention. In this young fool was the material for the making of a man, but self-indulgence and apathy of spirit were moulding it awry. If he won—and he meant winning—Heweitt intended exacting a promise from his defeated adversary.

Not for the lust of fighting or his own pleasure did he clench his fists. Maybe it was an absurd notion, but he had it in his mind that this battle was really for a man's soul.

Within half a minute of the dealing of the first blow he was aware that victory was not to be gained easily. Grantley, the attacker, fell upon him with an

impetuosity and scientific knowledge that warned him he was up against a dangerous opponent.

Before the first minute had passed Heweitt's guard was broken and the outlaw sent full length to the grass with a right-hander that left him dazed. It was a blow that would have counted out most men. As Heweitt slowly picked himself up he was feeling decidedly shaky. For a while after he was content with purely defensive work.

Grantley was quick to realize the advantage and encouraged to yet more strenuous endeavour. In his haste to make the fullest use of his antagonist's weakness, he took risks, and a couple of stinging body blows convinced him that he had over-estimated Heweitt's loss of strength.

Gradually, the purpose that had sent Heweitt into the battle shifted into the background before the advance of the lust of sheer combat that was growing in his heart. He found himself fighting with heartier goodwill. His blows increased in power. The original cause was forgotten in the peculiar joy of dealing and taking hard knocks. A species of exultation filled him every time he felt his arm jarred by the impact of his bony fist with Grantley's head. He experienced the satisfaction which a piece of good work well done will give when, with a smashing body blow, he sent his man reeling six feet backward.

"Take a breather," he panted—and not only out of consideration for his opponent.

"You're a tough nut to crack," gasped Grantley, grimacing.

"I'm going to do the nut-cracking," Heweitt retorted; and the other smiled grimly.

So they set to work again. Of "time" or rounds of a definite period they knew nothing. They fought until both were at a standstill, rested by mutual agreement, and began again.

"Learned the game in a good school, eh?" observed the remittance man during one of the rest spells.

It was noticeable that the superciliousness and condescension had left his voice.

"Rugby."

"Rugby!" Grantley's eye—the left was closed—opened widely. "By Jove! you an Englishman?"

Heweitt nodded.

"Great Scott! I thought it was only Yankees who took to this road-agent business."

"Not the only matter upon which you'll be having a different opinion by the time we have finished. Ready?"

Grantley nodded, and again they squared up.

It was a good honest fight, with neither attempting to take any unclean or unfair advantage. On the other hand, neither lost the least opportunity for inflicting punishment. Upon Grantley it was dawning that in the outlaw's toughened muscles and bony frame there was more of staying power than he had given the man credit for—more, perhaps, than he owned himself. The clean living was with Heweitt. Upon Grantley his excesses were beginning to take toll. He began to suspect as much and, with the fight in progress for half an hour, he suddenly went in to finish matters out of hand.

Heweitt met his rush without giving an inch, and they stood foot almost touching foot, driving in blows without cessation. Once Heweitt missed a shot to the ear by a bare half inch. Had he landed that blow, Rupert Grantley might have made for himself a different future. But the outlaw's head moved aside just far enough, and across Grantley's extended arm his fist shot a vicious cross-counter that spun the victim half-round. Before he could recover himself, Heweitt was upon him,

raining in blows from his bruised and bleeding knuckles.

It was a great attack, and although the remittance man made a desperate and stubborn rally his chance of victory had passed. His strength was leaving him, sapped by the terrible body blows to which Heweitt had pinned his faith. His will remained good; his science was still there; but the flesh was too weak. Grimly, stubbornly, well-knowing how hopelessly, he continued to fight, until the point was reached at which he could do no more. Exhausted, he dropped, and remained still.

He was far gone, played out, but he still had sufficient of his senses in him to understand Heweitt's meaning when the latter dropped on a knee beside him, and, wordless, extended a trembling hand. For a moment he contrived to pull himself together, shaking off the drowsiness that was enveloping him, and there was a frank and friendly expression in his one useful eye as he made shift to put his own fingers within Heweitt's grip. Speak he could not, but he made an effort to nod as if he fully understood.

Then he rolled over in a dead faint.

"And a chap with such grit is a remittance man!" murmured Heweitt wonderingly, his eyes on the battered face.

He was not regretting the fight was over.

For a long while he rested; then, gathering himself together painfully, he made a slow and laboured passage down to the creek. When he returned, feeling considerably better, he carried his own and Grantley's hat, filled with water.

An hour later, the contestants, presentable to the not-too-fastidious, were stretched at full length on either side of a blazing fire, finding comfort and consolation for physical pains in tobacco. Eating had been relinquished as a far too painful operation, but

a brew of coffee Heweitt made was being relished. Each was content to talk but little.

It was Grantley who first broke the silence.

"What the deuce possessed you, Heweitt, to take this business in hand?" he asked suddenly. "Yes—me," he answered a glance of inquiry.

And Heweitt answered: "Because I thought that, although you were a fool, you looked as though you were too good for the occupation you had chosen. Besides, you are English—so am I. You are young—and I hoped young enough to benefit by a lesson."

He puffed at his pipe, thinking of himself. He, too, had been a fool; he, too, was young in years; but he doubted if there were any lesson by which he could now benefit.

"You don't happen to make a practice of this kind of thing?" asked Grantley curiously, after another long silence.

"It certainly isn't a habit of mine."

He had ruined his own life; perhaps it would be counted in his favour if he had succeeded in saving another's.

Unheeded, his pipe went out. He was thinking of the man, Steve Heweitt, whose life had been wasted because he had been fool enough to take too seriously a fickle woman's change of mind. He felt a great shame of his own weakness. Lost in his moody thoughts, he missed the curious glances that Grantley shot at him.

Grantley, too, was doing some thinking. "Of course, I've been an awful rotter and all that," he abruptly jerked out. "I know it; though I hadn't looked at it in that way before. I thought I was enjoying myself. You've taught me different. I had plenty of money to spend; I've had nothing to worry about. I thought it didn't matter. If you hadn't interfered, I'd be thinking so still."

He sat up suddenly. "Do you know"; and he looked across at Heweitt, who was watching him.

One eye was closed, the lips were split and puffy, and his mother would surely have screamed could she have beheld the horrible change in his appearance; but in the battered features, the sound eye, Heweitt thought he read an expression of resolution, of firmness of purpose, that was new.

"Do you know, I'm going to make a fresh start. You've made me understand just what a rotter I am—what a fool I've been."

"I'm glad to hear it. That was what I hoped—what I fought you for."

And for the second time their hands met and gripped.

"Where are you off to, if—if it's not an impertinent question?" the younger man asked diffidently.

Heweitt shook his head. Where was he going? What did it matter which way he turned his steps? There was only one end to his existence; there could be no other. However long deferred, the termination was certain. There was no fresh start for him.

"Well, I was going to ask you," went on Grantley, still more nervously. "Would you—er—I mean—that is—er—. Will you let me go along with you, wherever that may be?"

It was a question that fairly brought the outlaw from out the brown study into which he had lapsed.

"Come along with me!" he cried with rough vehemence. "I'll see you hanged first. What! do you suppose I'd try to lift you out of purgatory just to set you on the road to hell? That's where I'm bound."

"But you—er—you can retrace your steps?"

The outlaw laughed harshly. From the trail he had chosen there was no turning back.

"I've made my bed; I'll lie on it. But I'll not

allow another to share it with me if I can help it," he answered firmly.

And there was that in his face and voice checking Grantley against further appeal or renewal of his offer.

Evening fell, and sitting closer to the fire, Heweitt listened to further confession of his companion's folly; but he spoke little himself. Body and mind were weary and lethargic; the effort to bring both into movement caused pain. A sense of futility oppressed him. It might be that he had saved Rupert Grantley from self-destruction, but he knew very well how impotent he was to save himself. In his arrogance he had convicted Grantley of being a fool and a coward. How much greater a fool and a coward had he proved himself! And what mattered the means whereby a man compassed self-destruction? "Satan reproving sin," Grantley had quoted against him. The young man had been justified.

No, it was not Amy who was to blame. He was above the meanness that could fix the responsibility upon her. Neither could he avail himself of the excuse with which other men have attempted self-exoneration—the threadbare defence that circumstances had been too strong. He had been a free agent; his choice had been deliberate. If only——

With a vigorous movement Heweitt roused himself and sat up. What did it all matter anyway? The thing had happened. He had to make the best and the worst of it.

A cool night wind was stirring the poplar tops, the stars were beginning to show themselves. Heweitt looked across the fire at his companion.

"Son," he called; "there's a blanket yonder, and a long sleep won't do you any harm."

Rupert Grantley stirred. He stood up, stretching carefully and with a wry face.

"Lord! Heweitt, but you're a thundering hard hitter," he said, trying to smile.

"You're not very deficient either that way," returned Heweitt.

"Good night."

Within two minutes the younger man was sound asleep, feet to the fire. A little after, Heweitt rose, knocked out his pipe and went towards the grazing horses.

The sun had been up some hours when Grantley awakened. For a while he looked about him in drowsy bewilderment as though unable to realize his surroundings. Then his eyes fell upon Heweitt, near the fire, where he was preparing breakfast. With a smile and cheery greeting the youngster hastened down to the creek.

The outlaw looked tired and worn, his eyes were red-rimmed, and the dark shadows about them were not wholly the work of his companion's fists. He had little to say during the meal; but when it was finished, he went to his blanket, and returned with a small gunny sack.

"Yours," he said curtly, dropping the bag by the side of his guest.

"Mine!" Grantley looked surprised. He frowned; for the bag had given out a chinking sound as of coin.

"Yes, yours. And if you mean what you said yesterday about making a fresh start, I reckon you'll find it helpful."

But Grantley stiffened.

"Oh, I say, you know; I can't do that. I can't take your money," he protested, his voice constrained.

"Thinking from where I obtained it?" and the outlaw smiled sardonically. "You needn't worry. I'm not asking you to handle ill-gotten money. The money's yours—not mine."

"Mine! But look here——," remonstrated Grantley.

"It's yours, I tell you," interrupted Heweitt impatiently. "The five hundred dollars you told me that you were beguiled into paying to Jim Carney for building lots in his town. It was a swindle; he cheated you. Lone Pine never will be a town."

"But," stammered Grantley; "but how—where——?"

"Oh I rode back last night after you'd fallen asleep," explained Heweitt wearily. "I didn't suppose you'd lied, and I didn't want any telling that Carney's a thief. I persuaded him into refunding. You can take the money with a clear conscience—if it's that worrying you. It's your money all right."

"But Carney's not the kind of fellow to give up money for the asking," said Grantley, still hesitating. "What persuasion——?"

"That's my business. But I tell you you needn't worry. I gave Carney a proper receipt. He's just bought his land back again, that's all."

"And you——." Grantley, wide eyed, could get no further.

Heweitt laughed harshly. "Oh! that's all right. Even if Carney tries to make out that it wasn't a fair and square business deal, it doesn't matter. One robbery more or less won't do Steve Heweitt much hurt. And now I guess we'll be saying good-bye. Time I hit the trail. Carney may be feeling resentful."

And he began to stamp out the fire and scatter the embers, Grantley watching him with a curious expression.

"Did—did you tell Carney who—you—are?" he asked timidly.

"Well, that helped matters," Heweitt admitted.

"And I wasn't wanting to make more noise than could be avoided."

"Then you can make quite certain Carney hasn't lost any time in letting the police know," cried Grantley emphatically. "Heweitt, I say now—er—will you—I want you to let me do something."

Very earnest, very confused and red of face, the youngster stood up to the outlaw.

"Well?"

"Look here, let me come along with you. Yes, I mean it." The words came out with a rush, and the young man went on in spite of Heweitt's impatient shake of the head. "You've done a lot for me, more perhaps than you are aware of—yes, and for others as well as myself. Let me do something for you. Carney will certainly go to the police. I know the man—better than you do. You shouldn't have told him who you are. For all you know the police may be after you already, and you're not the sort to throw up the sponge without a fight. Well, I *can* help you there. There isn't much I can do, I know; but I believe I might be able to do a bit—could hold them off anyhow for you to have a chance to get clear away. Now will you let me? I shall feel myself a mean, scurvy hound for the rest of my life, knowing what I do and the danger you are in, if I go slinking off without lending you a hand, after all that you've done for me."

He had not stopped to consider the full meaning of his proposition, to reckon the consequences to himself, but that he was in dead earnest was not to be doubted for a moment. Heweitt did not doubt. He put out his hand and seized Grantley's.

"My dear fellow, it's 'No,' very plain and conclusive. You'd be doing me no real good and yourself an infinite harm. There is only one end for me. If the police don't get me to-day, they will to-morrow

or the next day. But I'm glad and proud of your offer though I'd rather put a bullet through my head this instant than accept it. And now, so long, I must be off."

Releasing his hand, Heweitt picked up his saddle and walked towards the horses. Grantley followed, but without a word of further protest.

"Good-bye, and good luck to you, Heweitt," was all he said as the outlaw turned his horse's head in the direction of the hills.

An hour later, riding dejectedly in the direction of Lone Pine, he was made to feel more cheerful—less dissatisfied with himself. Two men of the Mounted Police unceremoniously halted him and demanded from where he had come; Carney certainly had wasted no time.

"From last night's camp," Grantley answered. And where this had been he described with sufficient accuracy.

"And have you happened to see a fellow——;" there followed a satisfactory word picture of his late companion.

"Looks rather a desperate fellow, as though he would be willing to shoot on small provocation?" he inquired eagerly.

"Oh, Steve Heweitt'll shoot all right when he feels that way," laughed the constable. "That's the bird. Did he shoot at you?"

"No. Of course I let him see that I was armed," returned Grantley with a fine assumption of confidence.

Both men smiled indulgently. "That fellow was Steve Heweitt; and once he held up a coach with five men on it, and everyone of 'em armed," one informed him. "Which way was he travelling, kid?"

"Well, I didn't ask him—didn't stop to have anything to say to him, not liking his appearance," said

Grantley simply. "But he was taking the cross-road leading westward. It was close to Scotchman's Creek I met him. The trail divides there, you know."

The policemen looked at each other and exchanged a few words in lowered tones.

Said one to Grantley: "It'll be about half an hour since you met him?"

"Between that and an hour. I haven't been riding fast. Do you think you'll catch him?"

"Well, kid," was the cheerful answer; "the pay for our job don't leave much to gamble with, but I reckon I can go you to the extent of two bits that Heweitt and we are acquainted before the day's out."

"Perhaps," Grantley told himself as he watched the policemen flogging their mounts forward, "perhaps not."

Seeing that Heweitt on leaving him had pointed for north-east, there was a possibility of the police being disappointed.

Grantley continued his journey, whistling. He was feeling that a fraction of his debt had been liquidated.

CHAPTER XIX

A MISCALCULATION

IGNORANT of the service rendered him, Steve Hewett held the black horse at a swift gait along the trail towards the hills. He was sure that he had not misinterpreted the expression in Jim Carney's little eyes, and with more than one of the hangers-on to Grantley's foolish generosity to be relied upon to feel an interest in his own identity when the police got busy, it looked as if prompt absence from the locality would be useful.

When he struck the head-waters of Red Willow Creek he turned almost due eastward. Edmonton barred his way to the north, and on his right hand, for hundreds of square miles, with wood and water in plenty, amid which but few trails save those of the wandering red man and the half breed fur-trapper penetrated, stretched an almost virgin land. In this gigantic basin, enclosed by the twin arms of the mighty Saskatchewan, white settlements were few and far between, and it was nothing against the district, in the outlaw's estimation, that posts of the Mounted Police were even yet more scarce.

It was a land of mighty distances, of wide rolling prairies and vast meadows dotted with thickets of poplar, birch, and aspen, where grass and smaller timber had followed the clearing away by fire of the aboriginal pine. It teemed with lakes and streams,

swamps and muskegs, high, pine-clad ranges, and rolling hills of sand. Game and fish also were abundant.

Herein might be found a hiding-place where he could lie up over the winter. He might contrive to slip through the well-patrolled line between Regina and the posts at Carlton and Prince Albert when spring came. There was a chance of making his way through a labyrinth of wood and water, perhaps to the shore of Hudson Bay. The west had been closed to him. It might be that in the east he would light upon the open door which should lead him to freedom, to ultimate removal from the country and the beginning of a new life elsewhere.

If Fate were against him—well, failure had but the one meaning. Cold, hunger, and the winter-gaunt wolves of this bleak and relentless northland had closed more than one life, even more futile and desperate than his own.

As the days went by and the nights grew colder, until one brought with it a powdery layer of frost on his blanket, Hewitt held eastward, where a railroad now runs, and settlements are dotted thickly, but where he found the impressive silence of the great wild broken by no more than the rustling of the wind-stirred trees, the howl or shriek of prowling beasts afoot after food, and the cries of birds.

Hiding-places he found in plenty, but he held long to none. The devil of restlessness was within him, keeping him ever on the move. Suspicion, instead of being lulled by the absence of his kind, grew even keener. The infrequent sight of a fellow being, even a red skinned one, drove him from a selected resting place. If he lighted upon a shack belonging to some hardy pioneer who had penetrated the wilderness, making temporary settlement, he was careful to avoid it. Distrust was with him always. He grew nervous

and jumpy. There developed in him a great fear, fear of the unseen, but ever suspected, which was even worse than the immediate expectation of meeting with a declared enemy.

With the bottom burned out of his frying-pan, and after five tobaccoless days, he stopped at a Hudson Bay post by Birch Lake, and was driven north, hot-foot, by a chance remark of the trader. New at his post, and not yet accustomed to the lonesomeness, the man wished him to remain at least the night. He was wholly unaware that he proposed entertaining a notorious outlaw, and his request held no sinister motive; but the suggestion was enough to arouse Heweitt's ready suspicions. He declined brusquely, and put forty miles between himself and the post before drawing rein.

One night he camped in the dense timber about Flagstaff Hill, and awoke the next morning to behold a four-inch covering of snow upon the land, stretching away in dazzling brightness as far as the eye could reach. Winter was due, and the need of a snug retreat drove the outlaw northward to the Eagle range of hills, with its V-shaped, pine-filled valleys. Here, an abandoned trapper's cabin was found, two days' work being sufficient to make it warm and habitable.

Before November had sealed the streams, however, the cabin was abandoned. Two white men, wintering at Vermilion, happened upon the shack while Heweitt was out hunting, entered, and helped themselves to a meal. The outlaw noted their occupation when he returned, and once more the curse of Ishmael operated. This time he went east and south, to come within an ace of losing his life in a blinding snow-storm of forty-eight hours' duration. An Indian was his rescuer, and for some days he stayed over at the red men's camp. Then the fear of betrayal set him moving again.

Several weeks later, he came upon a police trooper, badly frostbitten, half dazed, and wholly blinded, while returning to his camp in a poplar thicket near Tramping Lake. The man had been caught in a storm while on patrol, lost his direction and, later, his eyesight, and a further thirty-six hours would have seen him a corpse.

Heweitt brought him to his camp, tended him, packed his feet in snow, and bandaged his eyes. Anything less would have been plain murder. Three days later, the constable, who had been watching Heweitt at the stove with a puzzled expression, suddenly exclaimed—

“ Say, ain’t you Steve Heweitt ? ”

The outlaw straightened up, turned and faced him.

“ Well, what about it ? ” he asked quietly.

There was no more said, and, supper over, they sat with their pipes in casual conversation. But the next morning when the constable awakened he found himself alone. Heweitt had re-commenced his wandering. There was food in the shack, but he was aware that the policeman would not be fit to ride for three more days at least. He knew the conception of duty of the men of the N.W.M.P., and, desiring neither to kill nor to be captured, he had gone away.

Where and when would his wandering end ? In due course the answers would be furnished. From any looking into the future he resolutely turned away. The present was his consideration ; to maintain an existence that held out no promise and a freedom that brought him no pleasure.

—One day, with the jump from winter into spring imminent, Heweitt took a great risk. The hopelessness and dreariness of his life caused him to become more reckless of consequences. A craving for the company of his fellows urging him on, he hit Fort

Lacorne, an ancient trading-post established by the French at Sandy Point, some twenty miles along the south branch of the great river below "the Forks."

About the fort, which the Hudson Bay Company people had taken over, had grown up a straggling half-breed settlement, to which had drifted a score or more wandering pioneers and flotsam of the frontier. It was a poor enough place; but in the cabin of Jean Lamonte, which combined store, drinking saloon, dwelling-house, and blacksmith's forge, the gathering of men and the hum of voices, the warmth of the roaring pine-fed fire, and the clattering of drinking vessels, the heart of the outlaw discovered some relief.

None asked him whence he had come or whither he was going. They had no curiosity, but accepted him according to their estimate as a man, like themselves, wishing for no more than warmth, company, and the taste of liquor. He drank freely with them—they as freely with him. He told of his journey from the north branch; he listened to their tales of dog-teams and fur-traps. From the dimness of afternoon until late into the evening they sat together in the long wooden room, with its thick log walls and low ceiling.

Then, sudden and unexpected as a thunderclap from the clear summer sky, came the interruption:

"Throw up yer hands!"

There was not a lot of noise going about at the moment, and such as there was ceased abruptly as the command, high-pitched and nasal, shrilled through the room.

Quickly, almost nervously, came a repetition, with which a threat was coupled, and the arms of the man addressed started on their slow journey. The eyes of all were turned upon him.

"But, you won't shoot though," he drawled. The

voice was cool and mocking, matching the smile that crept about his lips. "Why, why you daren't. And you know it."

From behind the rude counter interposed the voice of Lamonte.

"Why now," he said, in wondering protest, his beady eyes travelling from the man with the gun to the seated figure with arms above the head. "Why now, what's this you do, eh? This fool play. It is not wanted."

"Fool play!" the gunholder lifted his voice triumphantly. "I knows what I'm doin' all right; better'n you do. Reckon you ain't wise to who this feller is. I am."

Some glanced at the speaker, but it was Heweitt who attracted most attention.

He was looking into the muzzle of the gun eight feet away without a wink of the eyelids. He had been caught off his guard at last, but in his face was no suggestion of concern.

"Well, *sacré nom!* an' who is he?" at length demanded the proprietor of the place a little impatiently.

The answer came prompt.

"Someone who can't fool me; that's who he is, you bet," replied the holder-up, chuckling.

He was a youngish-looking fellow, lean-faced and shifty of eye, and the state of his outfit betokened no condition of affluence. By artful and devious ways he had tried to draw Heweitt into conversation, and the attempt had not been successful. Seeing this, he had fallen silent, but he had been doing a whole lot of watching.

Doubtless he had been screwing up his courage, and at last had succeeded. Lounging up to Heweitt, he had begged a match. Taking the gift with one hand, he had pulled his gun with the other, making

a quick move backward as he levelled the weapon and shouted his command.

"Waal, an' who is he an' all?" one of the wondering men wanted to know.

"Who is he, eh!" repeated Idaho; to which name the holder of the gun responded, "Waal, to me he sure looks like Steve Heweitt—feller who held up the Edmonton stage, the Laggan coach, an' so forth. Mebbe you ain't heard of him?"

Some of those around had, and they began to view Heweitt with an increased interest. Lamonte's son, a young lad of sixteen or so, nearly fell off his seat through leaning too far forward to obtain a closer view of this celebrated person.

"How do you know, Idaho?" a burly Canadian trapper demanded.

"Waal, say, look at him?" returned Idaho, but not taking his eyes from his victim.

The men kept on looking. The eyes of the lad were fairly popping with excitement.

"He ain't said as he's Heweitt," began one man uncertainly.

"He ain't said he ain't," retorted Idaho. "And he'd be a liar if he did. I knew him all right, soon as he come in."

"If he is 'Eweitt," began Lamonte hesitatingly, acting as spokesman.

"If I am, you're all agreeing with what this fellow has done?" interrupted Heweitt.

There was an uncertain murmur; none was aggressively affirmative. Heweitt yawned.

"It won't do him no good denyin' that he's the goods," remarked Idaho gleefully.

"I don't deny it," Heweitt said with complete composure. "I'm not a liar. Gentlemen, our friend here is quite correct. I am Steve Heweitt. His memory has not misled him, though I cannot say I

am able to recall his acquaintance. And now what are you going to do?" His voice sounded sharply as he looked full at the master of the situation.

The latter grinned. Already he had the reward in anticipation.

"See that yer stays where I got yer. 'Keep them hands up!' he rejoined. "No funny business, or——"

"You make me tired," interrupted Heweitt wearily. "Are you such a fool as to suppose I'd come in here without taking precautions? If you will just look at the door, you'll see——"

They looked, with the ready instinct to follow a suggestion. And Idaho—proof that his nerve was not equal to his ambition—looked too. The rest saw—nothing. Idaho beheld a weird combination of brilliant fire-works and rapid meteoric effects.

Heweitt had covered the space between them with one leap, and his right fist struck a terrific hammer blow that landed squarely between the fellow's eyes. He went down flat on his back, the six-shooter exploding and sending a harmless bullet into the ceiling. His head bumped dully on the solid floor and he remained very still. By the time the onlookers had realized the ruse and its complete success, Heweitt's own gun was in his hand and he was prepared for contingencies.

"Keep on sitting down, gentlemen," he said pleasantly. "There's no need of a fuss just because that fool lost his head. We were quite comfortable before he started talking, and there's no reason why we shouldn't keep so. I'm not staying long. It was your company I wanted, and I'll be pleased to keep it while I am here. I'm hungry, and I mean staying while Jean fixes me up with a meal. Sorry to keep you if you've business elsewhere, but I want you to stay. But as I don't want to make your stay

tedious, I'll ask Jean to set the drinks up again."

Then he kicked Idaho, who was still without interest in the proceedings, outside the door, saying that the cool air might do him good.

It is to be presumed that the fresh air did prove beneficial. Anyway, before Heweitt was half through his meal, Lamonte's son came into the saloon in a mighty hurry and asked if he would come and look at his cayuse. He reckoned something was wrong.

Heweitt went out quickly. Something was wrong, but not with the horse. In an excited whisper the boy explained that he had seen Idaho go to the stable, take a pony, and ride like blazes. A few hours before Heweitt's arrival a mounted policeman had been in the settlement, halting for a drink on his way north to the post at the Forks.

Heweitt, thanking the boy, returned to the saloon to finish his meal and set up the drinks for the last time, what time his horse took in a feed. The next one was liable to be far distant. This done, he paid his score, forced his watch on young Jean as a keepsake, and got on the dead run.

He had two hours' law before a hard-lipped young man in blue-striped breeches, with bloody spurs and fond hopes of promotion, flashed through the settlement, flirting gravel along the southward trail. There was none other; it followed the river, and at the end was the railroad.

That young man had grit. He held to Heweitt's trail for sixty miles, cursing fluently though still hope-inspired; but he was a full three hours to the bad, sticking to the saddle by instinct and with eyes that with difficulty could be kept open, when Heweitt rode into the town of Medicine Hat.

There was need for prompt decision and the outlaw was not slow to make up his mind. It was a desperate chance he was about to take and he pinned

his hopes to audacity. At the depôt he learned there was no east bound train due until the afternoon, but one for the west went through in a couple of hours' time. That decided him. He bought a ticket westward.

The time at his disposal he filled in profitably. Leaving his cayuse at a livery stable, he sought a barber, who provided him with a hair-cut and neatly trimmed a distinctly ragged beard. Heweitt told the artist he would not have it removed altogether as he was to appear prominently at a wedding that was due. Later he sought a store, where he changed his garments for a more decorous outfit, the storekeeper having no doubt that he was other than he represented himself to be—a prospector who had struck it rich and was anxious to figure with credit at a matrimonial function. He permitted himself more than one sly, joking allusion, and Heweitt played up to him, nowise flurried. A keen exhilaration filled him; danger bred in him an excitement that uplifted his spirit without clouding his mental keenness and self-possession. It was a tall bluff he was putting up, but he believed in the maxim of the poker player: When you bluff, bluff high, hold your nerve, and see it out.

Could Idaho have been on the platform at the depôt he would not have given a second glance at the lean-faced, keen eyed, well-to-do looking business man in a neat tweed suit and carrying a grip, who hurried on to the platform within a few minutes of the arrival of the train.

Cool but watchful, Heweitt boarded the train, secured a seat, and was not sorry when the big bell behind the engine funnel gave out its warning note of départure.

From behind a paper he took note of his fellow travellers, but discovered nothing to cause him un-

easiness. With a feeling of relief he turned his idle eyes to the window.

He was not congratulating himself that all danger was past. That he was yet very far from being out of the wood he thoroughly understood. If the time came for shouting, it would be because he had been favoured with great good luck. Had he been aware that he was being so hotly followed, he would have known that he was enjoying no more than a respite. But danger was not immediate; at the nearest it was close on two hundred and fifty miles ahead. He was on the C.P.R., bound for British Columbia, through Kicking Horse Pass, and Calgary was the next important place of stopping. It was there the danger existed. It was possible that watch was being kept on the trains, but he hoped that observation of passengers would be only perfunctory.

However, if trouble lay ahead it was not to be avoided by anything he could do at the moment, and it was folly to worry about what might happen. He would make the most of the breathing time at his disposal. The most agreeable and obvious means to this end was prompted by his stomach. Getting to his feet, he sauntered along to the dining car, prepared for the next hour to concern himself solely with the very best meal the service could provide.

Nine months in the wilderness, nine months with meals roughly prepared and too often eaten in haste and discomfort, gave him agreeable anticipations of deft service, a white tablecloth, variety of dishes and the other amenities of civilized feeding. He was prepared to be critical once more, to linger over his enjoyment.

The meal came up to expectation, and Heweitt gave it his most earnest attention and appreciation. He was disposed to be leisurely, though aware he was thereby not earning the good-will of the attendant.

Coffee completed the meal, and he was raising the cup for his second sip when the entry of two travellers into the car caught his casual attention. When he saw them fairly the casualness departed.

CHAPTER XX

A CURIOUS COINCIDENCE

THE two passengers were a man and a woman, and they came down the aisle with the man in front. He was a big made man, tall and very square of shoulder, and it was evident he owned somewhat fastidious notions as to dress. Equally evident was his British nationality; while the firmness of his tread, and that curious air of proprietorship in which the English husband clothes himself when abroad in such circumstances, no less confidently proclaimed the lady with him as his wife. He was a good type of the well-bred, moneyed Englishman, with a heavy, fair moustache, and blue eyes that but for their faint expression of superciliousness would have been vacant.

His wife appeared to be a good deal younger than he, and inclined to thinness. She, too, had blue eyes, set rather too closely together to please a severe critic, but very large, and she owned a pretty pink-and-white complexion. If limited to a single word, her mental and moral qualities, so far as these may be suggested by appearances, could be summed up as "dutiful." Whatever her husband's choice or desire it would be accepted.

She was drawing off her long tan gloves as she entered the car, and her wedding ring shone with suspicious newness.

Eyes and brain abruptly arrested, Heweitt held the cup to his lips for an appreciable time before he recollected what he was about to do. By the time he set it down empty, the couple had passed on. A sardonic smile hovered around his mouth.

Fate plays some mighty queer tricks—ironic, wholly perplexing. Sometimes—too late as a rule—one's curiosity is satisfied as to the why and wherefore of such tricks.

Heweitt had considered the possibility of meeting on the train with someone whom he would rather have avoided, but the fantastic improbability of claiming as fellow passengers Amy and the man whom her family had selected as her husband had never entered his head.

He had recognized her at the first glance; but although her eyes had fallen upon him while passing, he had detected not the slightest change of expression, no sudden gleam in the full eyes, or faltering of step, to suggest that the recognition had been mutual. An abnormal self-control, he recollected, had not been formerly included amongst her characteristics; in fact, she had been rather prone to a ready display of her feelings. No, he felt confident that she was wholly unaware that her one-time lover was sitting within a few feet of her.

As for Herbert Verrinder, it was obvious that he had not troubled to notice there was another person in the car besides himself and his wife.

The Verrinders found seats at a table a little way beyond Heweitt and on the other side of the aisle. As they took opposite sides of the table, and Verrinder's broad back was towards Heweitt, his wife was facing her former sweetheart. Once, while her husband was making up his mind what they should eat, and twice during the progress of their meal, her gaze fell upon the bearded man with the tired eyes idling

at the table beyond. Once she met his glance full, but for no more than a moment. She turned away without betraying any expression more intimate than a faint annoyance at being stared at by a stranger.

The situation held most of the constituents of a very pretty comedy and, presently realizing as much, Heweitt found a curious enjoyment in it. So much so that he remained in his seat, a none too vague hint from the attendant notwithstanding. There came to him the reckless impulse to cross the aisle, accost the Verrinders, and, making known his identity, offer to Amy his humble congratulations.

But would she take them? What would she say and do? Of Verrinder himself, with whom he had had the slightest of acquaintance before leaving England, he could feel more certain. The big fellow would certainly open his blue eyes rather more widely, pull his long fair moustache, and ejaculate, "Stephen Heweitt! by Jove now!"

The temptation within Heweitt grew stronger every minute. And then came a swift revulsion of feeling. It would be a caddish trick to play.

He was actually on his feet to leave the car, when the door at the farther end opened to admit a girl, and her eyes, swiftly running over those seated at the tables, stopped dead when they reached Heweitt's face. She halted abruptly, and Heweitt, stepping into the aisle at that moment, glanced indifferently at Mrs. Verrinder and then looked full forward. This brought the girl at the far end within his vision, and he too halted dead in his tracks.

The next instant, face transfigured, he was striding forward without hesitation to welcome Hope Marley.

Surprise was swallowed up in the great flood of gladness that overwhelmed him, and made itself manifest without doubt or reservation. As he passed the Verrinders' table, Amy glanced at him sharply. But

he had wholly forgotten her presence—forgotten even her existence. He had forgotten that he was a man of evil deeds, an outlaw, in hourly peril of detection and apprehension—everything was forgotten in the sudden knowledge that the blue-eyed girl in the plain cloth dress was Hope Marley, the girl who had never been long absent from his thoughts since the ever-to-be-remembered day in the Sheep River valley, and whom he had come to believe he was condemned never to see again.

The meeting was as glad a one to Hope as to himself. Her eyes plainly said so; although Heweitt did not see the filmy moisture that almost immediately dimmed their candid glory, at the same time adding a fresh beauty. Neither was he aware of the swift fear for him that yet further quickened her fast beating heart.

If any doubt that Steve Heweitt was the man whom her love had chosen had lingered in Hope Marley's breast, it died at that moment of meeting. Let him be what he might, she loved him, wholly and for ever.

Her gloved hand was between both of Heweitt's, and being warmly squeezed and shaken, the while he was telling her how glad and surprised he was to see her again.

Hope was an unsophisticated girl, and meeting Heweitt on the train was a big enough shock, but it was by no means big enough to cause her to lose her head. Though her heart was thumping madly with the joy of seeing him again, a free man in sound health, though the swift recollection of his danger had already caused the glad flush in her cheeks to pale, she retained her presence of mind.

"Why, I declare! You on the train!" she cried. "Well, now, but this is just too odd for words, isn't it?"

She had been brought up in the habit of self-control,

to meet emergencies with equanimity and to think and act quickly; and in addition she possessed a high development of the quality which enables nearly all women and some few men to adapt themselves with perfect naturalness to an entirely unsuspected situation. The circumstances in which she found herself might have tried a woman of larger experience, but Hope showed herself mistress of them.

She had not been startled into pronouncement of Heweitt's name. Inexplicable as was his appearance, and more alarming even than inexplicable, she made no more of it than to suggest to whomsoever might be lending their attention that the meeting was purely natural though not an expected one.

"I'm just back from Winnipeg, where my father wanted me to stay over winter," she declared. "And I'm glad to be getting back again. Why, it was far colder than I have ever known it at home."

"And you're all alone?"

She nodded.

"And wanting a meal?"

"I'm starving"; and she laughed.

"Good! We'll soon fix that up," Heweitt declared enthusiastically. "I've just finished mine; but if you'll allow me to see after you and stay while you eat, I shall be delighted."

"Why, sure."

Heweitt found her a seat and summoned an attendant to take her order. During the meal, it was Hope who did the bulk of the talking; but her companion's eyes, their haunted weariness departed for the time being, never left her face. Little as he said, he was thrilling to the finger tips with gladness to which no words could have given adequate expression. Whatever Fate was holding in store for him at the end of the trip, the moment was pure enjoyment. His world was limited to Hope Marley.

And twelve feet distant was sitting a woman within whose breast was a wild commotion of curiosity, jealousy, and fear, whose patent nervousness was causing her husband to experience a faint wonder.

Immediately she had heard his voice, Amy Verrinder had been enlightened as to the identity of the big, lean, bearded man whose unmannerly attention to herself she had been silently resenting as "colonial." The years had altered him beyond recognition; yet now that she knew he was Stephen Heweitt it was easy for memory to prove to her that the change was no more than superficial.

He had remembered her—of that she felt certain. Horror had been her first sensation when the sound of his voice awoke remembrance of her former lover. She had felt afraid, and her impulse had been to rush from the car. But when she saw that the newcomer whom Heweitt had recognized was a woman, when she perceived the warmth of his greeting, and the extent of his delight of which eyes and ears gave her evidence, other feelings were aroused.

Heweitt was nothing to her now, but she was conscious of a resentment against the manifest intimacy existing between him and this unknown girl. She had not treated Heweitt well—although that had not been wholly her fault; none the less, it was a wound to her vanity to know that she had been forgotten. Doubtless the release from his promise she had written had been received with relief. It left him free to marry this girl whose intimacy with him was so great that she did not find it necessary even to address him by name.

For a moment Amy glanced at her husband's face, and she found its bored, stolid expression intensely irritating. He suddenly asked her if she were not feeling well, and his obtuseness exasperated her. With a fine inconsistency, she wanted to scream, to

spring up and accuse Stephen Heweitt of fickleness and inconstancy.

With an assumption of carelessness she glanced round, to see Heweitt with his head bent close to his companion's; she was whispering to him. Amy Verrinder bit her lip hard.

"In danger?" Heweitt replied to the question in a low voice. "Maybe; but it must have been a kindly Providence that engineered this trip of mine. I wouldn't have missed meeting you for anything on earth. Ever since that day——"

He checked at the agonizing appeal in the blue eyes, though finding in their terror a secret delight. He was thinking of the day in the Sheep River valley, but it was the hold-up of the Laggan coach that leaped into her recollection.

"Don't say anything about it," she implored. "But was—was it necessary? I—I hadn't thought, I suppose——. And the horrible man who was with you——"

Heweitt frowned. Then he realized that she was not thinking of what had been in his mind.

"Even an outlaw has to live," he said bitterly, for it seemed to him that there had been reproach in her voice. "I wanted money to get out of the country. I guess you have been mistaken in me."

"No, no, no," she said hurriedly. "You mustn't think I meant that. But I—I was foolish, I guess. The day you came to the ranch——"

"I haven't forgotten it—I shall never forget," he interrupted. "You were splendid. No one else would have done what you did; and there was no reason why you should do anything. Again and again have I asked myself why you did it."

"It was nothing," she rejoined in blushing confusion. "Any girl would have done the same. It was just common humanity. And you wouldn't let

me do all I wanted. But that's done with. It's now of what I'm thinking. How do you come to be here? What has happened? Surely the danger——"

"I hadn't much choice. It's a risk; but I'm used to taking chances. I've got to do so," he whispered back. "I can't tell you all now. A man gave me away, and I did what I thought was best. But you can't know how glad I am it has turned out thus. Maybe it'll prove my salvation. You'll have heard something about me, I daresay?"

Hope nodded. She had, indeed, heard much, too much. In Calgary, to where she had gone with her father, the name of Steve Heweitt had been enjoying considerable prominence. It was while in the city that she had learned of the stage venture between Lacombe and Laggan, and her father had yielded to her entreaty that such an opportunity for making acquaintance with the glories of the Alpine wonderland around Banff should not be missed. The outlaw's daring, his wonderful luck, and above all the discovery of the part he had played in the rounding up of the rustlers of the Clearwater, had captured the public imagination, though it was admitted that the sooner he was captured and made to pay for his pranks the better it would be for Alberta.

"Well, it's mostly true, I'm afraid," Heweitt went on. "I don't say it by way of excuse or exculpation, but I've done no harm wantonly, and those who have suffered by me are not a lot the worse. I have taken no life. I've been a fool; but I'm not going to squeal when the time comes for paying for my folly. But I would like *you* to know—to believe if you can—that I'm not quite so black as I daresay I have been painted; though God knows I'm aware I'm not fit to be here in your company. Maybe you're thinking——"

"I'm not thinking anything of the kind," inter-

rupted Hope indignantly, and her face became a warm red.

Then it was that Amy Verrinder turned for a second glance towards the couple. Hope's face she could see quite clearly, and she formed her own conclusions as to the rosy blush. Doubtless, being a woman, she could read in the girl's candid eyes the plain revelation that Hope herself was far from being aware of betraying, and that Heweitt failed to see, even as he failed to see the wonderful truth that lay beneath her agitation.

"Do you intend we should remain here all day?" asked Amy sharply, turning upon her husband.

He looked at her in genuine surprise.

"I am quite ready to go, if you are," he answered stiffly. "There is nothing to keep us, I presume. The food is atrocious and the waiting simply abominable. I should have imagined that a railway company so important as this would have taken care not to employ such inattentive, ill-mannered scoundrels as they do."

As they passed Heweitt during their progress from the car, Amy looked full at her former lover. He was quite unconscious of her proximity; but Hope Marley, who had not missed—perhaps had envied a little—the Englishwoman's distinctive air and the expensive quality of her clothes, did not fail to note the passing regard, and so full of meaning did it seem that her curiosity was awakened.

"Those people who've just gone out—do you know them or they you?" she asked quietly after the door had closed. "The lady looked at you as though you were acquainted."

"She well might," returned Heweitt, and he laughed shortly. "At one time"—he was looking steadfastly into Hope's face—"I believed I was going to marry her."

Hope's head went back in sheer astonishment. Here was an answer wholly unexpected.

"And why—why didn't you?" she asked in a low, hesitating voice after a brief silence.

"Because, little girl——," the term of endearment slipped out quite naturally, and neither appeared to notice its use—"because she wouldn't have me," Heweitt replied. "She wrote to tell me so, and I wasn't expecting it. She—or her people; it doesn't matter much which—had made a better choice."

He laughed bitterly. The last fact was so obvious.

"And it was because she jilted you——" began Hope indignantly. Then she stopped abruptly in some confusion.

It was really but little, indeed she knew of Heweitt. She remembered him at the surprise party, a good looking young cowpuncher, different in manner from his acquaintances and with a polish that they had lacked. Her brothers had known him and liked him, having proved him a fine horseman and shot, and entirely wanting in those qualities that render so many young Britishers of the better class obnoxious in Canadian eyes. He had made himself agreeable to her, with a subtle deference which had in it the attraction of novelty; and he had waltzed divinely.

When he came again to the ranch, it was as a fugitive from justice, though for what crime she had not the least idea. More than once in the days between then and the unexpected meeting on the Laggan trail had the swift transmutation puzzled her. Now, like a flash of lightning, came to her the solution of the puzzle. It was because this finely-dressed, superior-looking Englishwoman had turned him down.

So it was this that accounted for Steve Heweitt! Open blue eyes and curling red lips gave plain token of the indignation the knowledge brought her. She hated that woman who had just gone out.

Then she saw Heweitt's eyes, strangely soft, fixed upon her; the grimness had left his face and he was smiling. She recalled the words of endearment that had escaped from him; and her eyes lowered.

"You mustn't blame her," said Heweitt, as though he had read her thoughts. "She thought—her father and mother did—that there was a better husband than myself to be had. And they weren't far wrong, were they? Besides, a woman has a right to a free choice; and it was honest of her to let me know when she discovered she had made a mistake."

"She shouldn't have promised unless she were sure," protested Hope, shaking her head.

"And I shouldn't have been such a fool as to take her discovery so badly," said Heweitt. "I must have gone out of my mind for the time being. I made some trouble in Calgary when I received the news and, like a fool, didn't care about squaring up for it. So I took to the hills. And then—well, it was too easy; going downhill is not difficult, you know. Say that I am naturally a bad lot, and let it go at that. What followed seemed to happen so naturally."

"I suppose it was some fool kind of pride made me hate to admit that I had been in the wrong. But you mustn't blame her, Hope. I don't. A man who goes to the devil has himself to thank for it. He ought to be built of sterner stuff. I wasn't. Having done what I have, I'm not fit to be sitting here talking to you. It isn't right of me to keep you—nor safe for yourself; which is of much greater importance. Suppose someone were to recognize me. But I am glad of this chance of putting the truth before you, and of thanking you for all you've done for me. I shall never forget it."

He stopped; and Hope, who had been staring idly at the passing scenery, flashed a quick glance at him. Then her eyes dropped. She was but young—a frank,

simple girl—and in her soul was the openness and freedom of the great wild spaces amid which she had grown up. She saw things differently from the city-bred woman.

She loved this man, knowing him for what he was, and she was not ashamed.

"I think I understand," she said very gently.

"Thank you."

"And you love her still?" she whispered.

A laugh answered her, natural, whole-hearted, pregnant of meaning. A volume of words of denial could not have been more explicit—nor have made her more glad. For in it Hope heard beyond fear of all negation the full answer to her question. Heweitt's simple, "I have just forgotten I ever did love her," was wholly superfluous.

A great joy filled her. Come what would, the glory of that moment could never be taken from her.

She raised no demur when he said he must take her back to her seat. No word passed between them during the transit; but when with a smile and a long pressure of his sinewy fingers he left her, she whispered:

"You will take care?"

"Why, sure I will!" he smiled back.

And he went down the aisle with uplifted head and springy step, exalted, ignorant that from two seats away Amy Verrinder had been an interested witness of the leave-taking.

Verrinder, too, had condescended to notice him—and had even discovered an indolent sort of interest; perhaps something about the outlaw had struck the big Englishman as vaguely familiar.

"Fellow who has just gone through—did you notice him?" he asked his wife. "Seems to remind me of someone."

"He should. His name is Stephen Heweitt,"

replied Amy quietly, turning her gaze from Hope Marley to look out of the window.

"Heweitt! Heweitt of Aldton, do you mean?" he said, actually sitting up.

"Yes."

"By jove! how odd! Why——."

And then he recollected the relationship in which Stephen Heweitt had once stood to his wife, and he looked at her solemnly.

"Did you recognize him before?" he said. "He was in the dining-car, I remember."

"Yes." Her eyes met his with perfect calm. "He has altered, don't you think?"

"By jove, yes!" ejaculated Verrinder again. But he did not pursue the subject further.

Later, he told himself what a pity it was that some Englishmen, decent fellows too, should become so "colonial" in their appearance and manners after a few years abroad.

CHAPTER XXI

THE REQUITAL

HWEITT found the smoking-car right behind, and, cigar in mouth, sat down to think over the strange coincidence of the double meeting. It was wonderful how sardonically humorous Fate could be!

After a while, his thoughts turned more definitely upon himself. Time had been travelling on wings since his boarding of the train, and Calgary could not be many hours ahead. He was conscious of a lively apprehension that, when that station was reached, he would find something of immediate interest to himself. He might find it even sooner.

He had no means of knowing whether his enemies had received warning. If Idaho had been successful in his quest, the police would certainly have lost no time in getting on the trail. Would they have learned it finished at the railroad? If as much were suspected, telegraphic warnings would certainly be sent up and down the line. Watch would be kept at all stopping-places, and it was quite possible some lynx-eyed official might penetrate the disguise of the trimmed beard and the store clothes.

Just what he would do in the event of such discovery Heweitt had not made up his mind; but he was determined, if the worst happened, that Hope Marley should not know. If it came to arrest, for her sake he would submit without making resistance.

There was, however, no sense in anticipating trouble, and maybe his luck would still hold.

From a train official passing through the car, Heweitt learned there would be no stop before reaching Calgary. With this assurance of respite, he settled down comfortably.

He took a seat next the entrance—a strategic point. Presently the door opened to admit a tall, wiry-built, clean-shaved man of good appearance. As he swung the door open his eyes fell upon Heweitt sitting fronting the entrance. Hand on the door, the man hesitated, looking at Heweitt, attention mingled with frowning uncertainty, as one doubtful of recognition. It was only for an instant; then he pushed the door behind him, moved on, and took a seat on the further side of the car.

Heweitt did not miss the brief hesitation, the arrested glance, and the doubt that slipped into the newcomer's eyes. He did not betray himself, however, though his memory was better than that of the man, whom he had at once recognized as a passenger on the held-up Edmonton stage. Plainly something about himself had jarred the man's recollection, arousing a suspicion, but no more.

Leaning back, Heweitt appeared to be gazing idly from the window. He smoked slowly and carefully, features composed, eyes serene. But beneath the mask was neither quietude nor satisfaction. His brain was racing, his senses alert.

The man behind was watching him, he felt sure; but there must be at least a couple of hours before Calgary would be reached, and he believed himself in no danger until then, even though the man succeeded in convincing himself that it was actually Steve Heweitt, the outlaw, seated within a few feet of him.

He was not young enough, and he did not look a fool was Heweitt's summing up. He would not make

trouble yet, even if he got to feel sure of his identity. He would wait until he got to Calgary. And then—Heweitt went no further. What was to be, would be.

The strange meeting with Amy and her husband, the finding of Hope Marley on the train, and all the mad and sad thoughts begotten as a consequence, had shaken him. His nerve was not failing, but he was ready no longer to believe himself the shaper and master of his destiny, but a plaything in the hands of a capricious and malicious Fate, whose purposes were beyond all understanding, and whose decrees it was useless to attempt to evade.

What would be, would be. Meanwhile, he had two hours or more in which to await its coming. The last twelve months had taught him patience. And he had tobacco.

He had need of both. Never had time moved more slowly. There was nothing to break the monotony of its laggard passing. But few men were in the smoker. At intervals one would leave his seat or another would enter; but none came to sit beside the immobile figure by the door, or try to engage him in conversation.

The man whose suspicions of Heweitt had been aroused, held to his place as fixedly as the brooding outlaw himself.

At last the critical moment drew near. The great bell forward clanged out its warning, the passengers bestirred themselves and, slowing down, the train entered Calgary station.

As it slid along the platform Heweitt caught sight of more than one figure in the too-well-known uniform of the N.W.M. Police.

The earnest young constable from the Forks had not been able to overtake the outlaw, but he had done the next best thing. Having held to the trail as far as Medicine Hat, without wasting time making in-

quiries or searching the town, he had sent his warning messages up and down the line.

With hat well down over his forehead, troubling no more as to what the man whose suspicions had been aroused meant doing, Heweitt was on his feet and ready to act before the train had jolted into its dead stoppage.

The moodiness had left him. He was again vigorous, alert, purposeful. Hope Marley was getting off at Calgary, and come what might, he intended having a last word with her.

As he hurried from the smoker to Hope's car, he was followed by the man whose suspicions had been aroused. The man stepped upon the platform and went up to a corporal of the Mounted Police. Other policemen were waiting to scrutinize the passengers as they left the cars.

Heweitt hurried on to Hope's car. Things looked bad, and at all costs he must see her again—and before it happened!

Hope was on her feet, gathering together her belongings, wondering fearfully if the discovery of Heweitt had been made, and wishing that she might see him again before the train carried him away were her prayer answered.

Straight towards her he went. In all probability it was the last sight of her that ever would be his. He did not see Amy Verrinder, though her seat was but a few rows away. She saw him, however, and for the moment her entire interest was centred on his leave-taking of Hope.

"It's good-bye, little girl," said Heweitt, and it cost him an effort to keep his voice steady. "I suppose I shall never see you again; but I shall always think of you and the way you were willing to risk everything for my sake."

He had seized both her hands, and was looking

down with hardly controlled passion into her frightened eyes. In this supreme moment the grip he had on himself was weakening, and there was no mistaking the look in his eyes.

He loved her, and, in the joyful heart-flooding realization, her fears and troubles were overwhelmed.

Her eyes filled with tears. She tried to speak, but the words would not come. Her throat seemed to close up. But her flushed face told both her great joy and her secret.

Heweitt thrilled.

"Whatever happens, wherever I may be, for so long as I shall live——"

For an instant he paused. The fore-end door of the car had opened to give admittance to a corporal of the Mounted Police, the tall, wiry man following quickly behind. Heweitt heard; his ear detected the decisive, military step; no need to inform him what had happened. There was scant time at his disposal. His head bent still lower, and in a vibrant whisper he completed the sentence.

"—— I shall be your lover."

"See your man?" queried the corporal in a whisper.

"There he is," came the whispered reply.

But the eager young corporal made a mistake. Two quick strides took him to a tall man stooping over a seat, and his hand, falling upon Herbert Verrinder's shoulder, brought him round and upright.

"I say," protested Verrinder angrily, his British phlegm stirred. "What the devil do you mean——?"

"Don't worry," came the crisp rejoinder. "There's a man we're looking for. Well?" He faced the wiry man.

The latter shook his head. "No, no. The man yonder talking to the girl."

Releasing the astounded Verrinder, the corporal made towards Heweitt, who still retained Hope's

hands in his. She recalled afterwards that their firm pressure did not slacken; the strong fingers betrayed no agitation. The moment had come, and Heweitt knew what he was going to do. Resistance, a struggle within arm's reach of Hope, was impossible.

The corporal's hand fell on his sleeve, and Heweitt turned to face him.

"Well?" he said calmly.

"Let us have a look at you," the corporal said brusquely.

This man was well-dressed and was wearing a neatly trimmed beard, whereas it was a clean-shaven man the police were looking for. Possibly the policeman had his own ideas as to the availability of shaving-outfits upon the plains.

"This your man?" he asked. "Is he Heweitt?"

"It's the man that was in the smoker," began the Canadian hesitatingly.

"Dick! Why, how absurd!"

The stillness of the car was broken by a feminine voice, surprised, expostulatory, high pitched with annoyance.

Swiftly Amy Verrinder was beside the corporal, her husband staring after her in scandalized amazement.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "This is my brother! Dick, why don't you tell the man how utterly ridiculous he is?"

Heweitt laughed, and the corporal raised his right hand respectfully.

"It's all right, ma'am," he said gravely. "There's no need, I guess, for you to be alarmed. It's supposed there's an outlaw aboard this train, and we got to do our duty. What do you say?" And he turned inquiringly upon the accuser.

The man looked uncomfortable. From Heweitt, who met his eyes with a good-humoured smile, he

glanced hesitatingly at Amy and thence to the policeman.

"I guess I made a mistake," he muttered sheepishly. "I'm sorry, mister"—this to Heweitt—"but I—I—memory must have gone wrong."

Then Amy laughed, a little gurgle of amusement. The laugh convinced the corporal.

Heweitt showed himself willing to let the man down easily.

"That's all right," he said genially. "No need to apologize."

The young corporal saluted Amy, and glared at the wiry stranger whom he followed out of the car.

The other passengers, interested for the moment in the drama, turned to their own affairs leaving the principal actors to their own devices.

Verrinder, his face blank, was staring at the back of his wife's head. Hope, with pallid face and eyes downcast to hide the tears that flooded them, was standing a little to the rear of Heweitt, trying to realize that the danger threatening her lover was actually past. She drew a deep breath.

"Thank God!" she repeated voicelessly.

Excitement still bright in her eyes and colouring her cheeks, Amy Verrinder, one gloved hand tightly gripping a seat-end, was looking fixedly at Heweitt, who, after a quick glance at Hope, had turned so as to face her.

Slowly his hand came up, and, bareheaded, he returned her gaze, his eyes troubled and remorseful. Suddenly he leaned towards her.

"We shall remember the debt all our lives long," he said solemnly. "May God bless you, Amy, and send you all happiness."

He missed the quick little shiver that had passed through Amy, who had not missed the "we."

The brightness was dying from her face. Her dry

lips quivered, but she said nothing. Then, before she could guess his intention, he had lifted her hand to his lips—a queer kind of fraternal salute that might have interested the blue-eyed corporal of police had he been a witness.

Verrinder, a wondering spectator of a scene wholly incomprehensible to him, relieved the situation. Stalking to Amy, he touched her on the shoulder.

"Will you be staying any longer, Amy?" he asked stiffly. "If not, we will get our things together. Perhaps you have forgotten that we arranged to break the journey here."

Before Amy could turn, Hope came impulsively forward. The scorn she had felt for the fickle Englishwoman was overwhelmed by an outrush of gratitude and pity. Her arms closed about Amy's slim shoulders, and her lips were pressed against her cold cheek.

"May God bless you for ever and ever!" she whispered brokenly. "I can never give you sufficient thanks."

Amy made no attempt to return the caress. Still looking at Heweitt, her lips formed an all but soundless "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he repeated.

And in the inclination of his head there was something almost of reverence.

In a few seconds the Verrinders had left the car. Heweitt turned to Hope.

"And you, little girl?" he asked tenderly, taking her hand.

"It is from here that I go home."

"Alone?"

"There is no one to meet me. Dad believes that I am still in Winnipeg."

"Back to the Sheep River by yourself?" He shook his head.

"Why not?"

"I cannot let you do it. If you go, I must go with you."

Terror showed swiftly in her tell-tale eyes.

"No, no!" she cried vehemently. "The danger. Someone will know you. This is your good chance to escape. Would you make things worse for me?"

Her voice was piteous.

"I can't let you go. I will not leave you again."

He felt her fingers quiver within his hand, but they were not withdrawn. She looked at him quickly, a flush rising in her rounded cheeks.

"I shall go with you," he said slowly.

"Home is the only place I have to go to, but you must not come," she returned.

"There is another place," he murmured; and his burning eyes forced her to look at him.

There was a pause. Then—

"Where?" she asked faintly.

"Where I am going—to British Columbia. If you will go with me," he added. His head lowered; his voice dropped to a whisper. "Dare you, Hope? Can you trust me? Will you come with me—as my wife? And in British Columbia, or some other country, by God's grace and your help, I'll try my best to make a good man out of what's left of Steve Hewitt. Will you dare the risk?"

She looked past him at the platform along which passengers were hurrying to take their seats in the train. The police were satisfied that Steve Hewitt had not been on the train, and permission had been given for the continuation of the journey. Suddenly the engine-bell sent out its warning clamour.

He was asking her to give up all—country, home, family, and in return he offered her a man's love, the chance of a man's redemption.

She had to decide quickly. The engine-bell was

nearing the end of its ringing. In a few more seconds the train would be in motion.

What should be her answer?

Suddenly Hope turned her face to his. The blood had ebbed away from the skin, leaving it white from forehead to chin; but in her glorious eyes, veiled with mist, plain for even a man to read, there shone through the veil that perfect love which casteth out all fear.

"I'll come, Steve," she whispered.

Corporal Glyn idly watched the train steam slowly out of the station. He had allowed a colleague to superintend the search of the train. After all, he had argued, one corporal was as efficient as another, and—well, Hewitt *might* have been there.

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